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Geronimo was the most famous of all the Indian chiefs and his name is now the battle-cry of American soldiers, an ironic tribute to the cunning and bravery of a man who held the US Cavalry at bay.

In *Geronimo Rides Out* Geoffrey Bond has written a fast-moving account of the adventurous life of the last great Indian warrior chief.

GERONIMO RIDES OUT

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

*

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Geronimo Rides Out

by

GEOFFREY BOND

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CHAPTER I

THE WINNING OF A NAME

'GERONIMO! Geronimo!'

The voices were calling from the other side of the canyon, not as a summons, but in acclamation.

The young Apache warrior heard them and smiled, his strong bronze face creasing into rare lines of satisfaction.

This was the moment for which he had been waiting all his life.

The moment when his enemies would recognize that in a single Indian they had met a match for their entire forces.

But though the Mexican pursuers had hailed their Apache foe in traditional manner, by bestowing upon him one of their own names, it did not seem likely that he would live long to enjoy that singular honour.

This was the end of a sortie that had been doomed from the very beginning.

With two fellow braves he had left the tribal village and set out, far across the southern deserts to Mexico. There had followed a raid that by its sheer effrontery had seldom been equalled in the annals of tribal history.

The youth who had planned that escapade had been Gokliya, which means 'He Who Yawns.' Such had been Geronimo's name since birth, only now to be replaced by the Mexican title bestowed in the midst of battle.

Consistently had the young brave sought the honour that he believed to be his right, but always he had failed—until now.

But defeat also stood at his elbow, like a menacing shadow, with death not far away.

The newly-named Geronimo promised himself that whatever happened he would meet his fate like a true Apachê, proving himself beyond all doubt in the eyes of his people.

His scheme had been well laid, if with a dangerous amount

of bravado. It had not been difficult to persuade two companions to join him in the venture, for the spoils offered were rich indeed.

Or rather, they would have been rich if all had gone according to Geronimo's original intention.

Now he was the only one of the trio left alive, and if he managed to escape at all it would be with nothing more than his own bravery to show for the whole ridiculous incident.

The idea had been to openly attack a Mexican township, holding the citizens to ransom, loading many pack horses with booty, and then galloping back to the barren wastes, beyond the reach of all pursuers.

This plan was agreed upon, with the typical Indian disregard for the swarthy Mexicans. The three Apaches knew very well that their tribe was held in great, if frightened respect by their neighbours across the border, who were constantly coming into unpleasantly close contact with the raiding warriors whose paint-slashed faces and piercing screams struck terror into every Mexican heart.

All had gone well until the village had been sighted.

It appeared quiet enough as it dozed in the hot afternoon sun, and the three Indians lay in the shadow of some big boulders looking down at their objective.

The place had not been chosen without careful consideration, for the trio had scouted the vicinity well and with deadly thoroughness, to pick the ideal spot for their raid.

With absurd bravado they had passed many a lonely farm and village, making no attempt to hide as they summed up the possibilities of each and in every case found them wanting.

Three Apaches, they boasted, were more than a match for any bunch of cowardly Mexicans. And almost as proof of that there had been no attempt to drive the snoopers away.

So the friends laughed together, proud of the fact that not even whole communities of Mexicans cared to tangle with but three of the much-feared warriors when they stalked abroad.

On they went, appraising each new settlement as they came to it, but always with dissatisfaction.

Either there were no suitable horses, or the local stores looked poor and unlikely to yield much in the event of attack.

When Geronimo's accomplices were beginning to tire—for they had come a vast distance on foot since leaving the lodges of their tribe—the braves finally found the most suitable place of all.

It was quiet and dusty, like all such remote settlements, but by all appearances the store was well stocked, and several sturdy-looking horses stood tethered to hitching-posts in the single main street of the town (if such it could be called).

They lay for a while, resting and watching the scene before them, and it was then that the two other Apaches noticed the strange stillness of the sleeping town.

Geronimo nodded when this was pointed out.

'It cannot be helped,' he murmured, noting with amusement the surprise that flooded over the other warriors' faces.

'I had hoped that there would be more people about to watch,' he said. 'They must have seen us coming, and no doubt are already skulking like coyotes behind the shacks, praying that we are not scouts for a big war party.' Geronimo chuckled, 'Time is too short, and we have much to accomplish before sundown, or I would not be averse to taking a scalp or two myself!'

Certainly the marauders feared nothing from the Mexican villagers, and made final arrangements for the coming coup.

Together the three of them would attack the store, load the horses with booty, then be up and away like a desert wind before the sleepy inhabitants even realized an Apache raid was in progress.

It was all so easy—in theory. In practice events worked out very differently.

Fleet of foot in their soft moccasins the attackers descended on the township. They ran empty handed, with only light bows and arrows slung on their backs, for from past experience they

knew it was most unlikely that they would be stopped or even challenged.

But this time it was different. Hardly had they reached the nearest houses when bright spurts of flame stabbed out from the darkness behind the empty windows.

Geronimo smelt smoke, felt a bullet clip his black hair, and knew that he had made a terrible mistake. Instead of raiding a quiet and harmless village they had run straight into a well-prepared ambush!

On looking back it was easy to understand everything. Word had been passed along at each stage of their progress, farm informing farm that Apache warriors were in the vicinity, and village after village alerting itself for the attack that every Mexican believed must develop before long.

But it was too late to look back now. It was too late to even turn and run, for those noisy guns would easily pick off three figures before they reached the skyline, no matter how skilfully the Indians might bob and weave as they went.

Somehow the raid had still to be carried out. Somehow the ambushers must be tricked. Geronimo's lips parted in the spine-chilling war cry and he waved his companions forward, diving in the direction of the very bullets that sought to bring them down.

Geronimo's reasoning was always that the unexpected proved most successful. His tactics now might cause a momentary lull in the firing, as the unseen Mexicans paused to see what their Apache foes were trying to do. And then, while the snipers were reloading, it was the Indian leader's idea to grab the horses and sweep out of town before the citizens had chance to give chase.

But that plan was never put to the trial. Before they had covered many more yards both of Geronimo's friends were dead.

He saw one on the right throw up a hand, as if in a last despairing signal, before toppling into the dust and lying there, an untidy heap of humanity that would never move again.

The second Indian was luckier, if a few more blessed minutes of life could be called that. He dodged the rain of raking gunfire, miraculously keeping his feet on ground that was pockmarked with the impact of many bullets.

Side by side he raced on with Geronimo, until only a small distance separated them from the horses, now rearing and whinnying in fright.

Then it happened. A stray slug caught the Apache in his chest, swung him round like a top, and sent him rolling beneath the churning hooves of one of the horses that he would now never mount.

Even the foolhardy Geronimo saw that it was useless to carry on the attempt, and flung himself into a deep gully that lay, overgrown with bushes, a few feet away.

Gulping for breath and sore with bruises where his body had hit the ditch, the Indian peered out from his shelter to see what was happening outside.

He saw his dead companions lying where they had fallen, while a horde of angry Mexicans ran out of the buildings and began the search for the last of the three raiders.

Somehow no one had seen him jump into cover, for all eyes had been upon the second Indian and his attempt to reach the horses.

Those horses were now being unloosed as their owners swung up astride them before riding off on the trail of Geronimo. The Mexicans were convinced that in the recent skirmish he had given them the slip and was now heading out of town.

The Apache warrior lay low, eyeing the horsemen as they galloped away, feeling the ground shake beneath the tread of their galloping mounts.

When all was quiet he would slide away in the opposite direction.

He turned carefully and saw that behind the ditch stretched a wide area of farm land, composed mainly of grain fields separated by narrow channels along which water could be conducted for irrigation purposes.

That was the way, Geronimo decided. The ground allowed fast movement, and though there was not a scrap of cover until a distant range of hills was reached he would depend upon the speed of his own sinewy legs to get him out of any further danger that might develop.

Now the horsemen were well away. Quietly he pulled himself out of the gulley, glancing to right and left to make sure that no villagers had seen him.

All was well. He set out at a steady lope, heading for the hills, where he knew he would at last be safe.

The wolf-like gait was lazy, but deceptive. If necessary Geronimo and his people could keep it up effortlessly for day after hot day, with only the minimum of rest and refreshment to enable them to cover vast distances.

It was not the homecoming he had planned for himself, but it was better than lying back there in the village like his poor dead companions. And Geronimo knew there was always another day in which to return and wreak the revenge that the failure of his plans demanded.

The township was some way away now, and he plodded on, increasing his pace in an effort to make those still distant hills more accessible. He well knew that such distance was deceptive, and would not allow himself to relax until his feet touched the bare rock face that promised shelter and final safety.

The horsemen must be well away now on the other side of the town, he thought. Strange how they had jumped to the conclusion that he had escaped that way, but it seemed obvious, as the country was dotted with shrubs. A man on the run could give his enemies the slip by making the most of such coarse cover. It would never have occurred to the Mexicans that such as Geronimo would rather match his wits against theirs, and by making use of no cover at all make good his escape.

He was shaken back to his senses by the thud of a bullet that buried itself in the sandy soil a yard before him.

The Apache swerved automatically and swung round to see from which direction this unexpected attack had come.

He saw a solitary farmer standing in a far field, raising his gun for a second shot.

Geronimo set his teeth and advanced his pace, cursing the luck that had betrayed him at this late moment, when safety was so near.

He did not worry about the marksman's aim so much as the fact that the shots would alert the riders and bring them hot-foot to his trail.

Fine runner that he was he could not beat horses in an open race, and though he had a considerable start there was still a long way to go, and those implacable hills seemed as far away as ever.

Again he increased speed, hearing the second bullet splat harmlessly somewhere behind, but aware that the report would echo back to sound a warning for those searchers from the village.

There was not much time left if he was to reach the hills unseen. If he was spotted soon his advantage would be lost, for the Mexicans could chase him up among the rocks and cut him off there.

Breath grunted in his chest as Geronimo renewed his efforts.

The bow and quiver of arrows bobbed against his back, heavier all at once when before they had been hardly noticeable. Yet he dared not discard his only weapon, which might yet be a means of saving his life.

So he ran on, wondering how long it would be before he felt the ground vibrate to drumming hooves.

It was not long. The horsemen must have turned on hearing the first shot, guessing the position. It took them little time to cut across open country, by-passing the village and heading for the flat fields that stretched towards the misty mountains that formed a natural boundary.

Then they saw the lonely figure of the Indian as he ran for his life. It would be easy, the horsemen reckoned, to sweep down upon him before he could go much further. It would be ridiculously easy to finish off the last of the raiders.

But they had underestimated Geronimo, whose dogged determination had brought him within a last spring of those outer foothills on which his eyes had been set for longer than he cared to remember.

They were shooting now. The bullets whistled round his head like angry flies, and Geronimo heard several of them ricochet whining into the thin blue sky.

That gave him hope. The shots were hitting solid rock—it could not be far before the tall boulders yielded sanctuary.

Sweat poured into his eyes. He wiped it away and peered forward, seeing a great canyon that reared high and wide, its sheer walls painted with deep purple shadows and mottled green with vegetation.

Like a deer Geronimo leapt, clearing an open chasm that lay in his path. This would bring the horses up short, he told himself.

It would be a little while before the riders could coax their steeds over or round that initial hazard. And by then he would be deep in the hills, and for a while the advantage would be his.

The Apache meant to make the most of every second. Lizard-like he scuttled from boulder to boulder, feeling the palms of his hands scorch as he clung briefly to their sun-burnished faces.

Carefully he crawled to a high vantage point to see what was happening below. All he could see was the line of horses, standing heads down as their reins lay limp towards the ground.

Where were the Mexicans? Geronimo answered his own question.

Undoubtedly they were somewhere among the surrounding rocks, cautiously skirting the canyon as they began to search.

He listened. All was ominously still. Not a breath of wind stirred the late afternoon into life. Not a bird cried. Not a tell-tale stone fell. Not a voice called or so much as whispered.

Yet the Indian knew full well that not far away lay his potential killers, awaiting a chance to draw a bead on him and send his body toppling down into the blue depths far below.

He glanced up at the sky, which was already beginning to darken towards transient dusk.

Soon it would be night, and that would be his chance of escape—his only chance. If he could hold out that long against the armed hunters who now moved through the hills, intent on surrounding and killing their human quarry.

Desperately Geronimo sought a hiding place, but in all that place of crags and canyons there was none. None that he considered safe enough, for each cranny had a blind spot, and he knew he dare not lie up for fear of being surprised by the Mexicans, who would take good care to search every likely hole and rugged corner.

They felt confident of catching their man, and rightly so, for they outnumbered the single Indian by more than a score.

But they had reckoned without his cunning and undoubted bravery.

If they imagined Geronimo would merely seek shelter they were very wrong, for his next idea was to carry the battle to his enemies, if only momentarily.

In that moment he intended to strike back unexpectedly and prevent himself being cornered, which was the Mexicans' obvious intention.

Fitting an arrow to his bow he began to creep forward, eyes alert as an eagle's for some sign of movement among the surrounding rocks.

He realized well enough that in doing this he presented a target for any nearby marksman, but also knew that the colour of his bare skin would be a great advantage, for its bronze blended naturally with the sandstone background and he intended to make the most of such natural camouflage.

The Mexicans had no similar advantage, for their tall sombreros and bright serapes could easily be picked out, and Geronimo was not slow to make the most of that fact.

Anyone with lesser powers of observation might have missed the movement that could have been nothing more than the flutter of a bird's wing.

But Geronimo not only saw it, he aimed and fired.

The Mexican rose to the skyline clawing at the arrow that bit home at the base of his neck. The Apache did not shoot again, for he knew there was no need.

Slowly the man spun and sank, buckling at the knees until he could keep his balance no longer. After he disappeared there came the sound of shots from below as the other searchers saw their stricken companion.

Geronimo sprang, changing his position among the rocks, wasting not a second of the respite he had earned himself.

When they came to look he would be gone from the previous position, and that was the way he intended it to be until he could make the final getaway. Always literally one jump ahead of the enemy.

Again Geronimo repeated the manœuvre; again he brought down a Mexican. Now they stood equal, two losses on either side—and one Apache to go.

But that Apache was determined that he would still cheat the Mexicans and the death which they represented. Skilfully he dodged among the hills, more than once coming within feet of a group of searchers, but always managing to remain unseen.

Repeatedly he glanced up to the sky. Night had never seemed so long in falling, but at last its dark blanket was spread across the land, and Geronimo knew that the worst of his ordeal was over.

He had no intention of making any further assault on the enemy. His one purpose was to steal through their encircling web and begin the long march to the village of his people.

The Mexicans were naturally indolent and by now very hungry.

As they lit fires and prepared food they left insufficient guards to watch for the moving shadow that had eluded them.

It was easy enough for Geronimo to pick his way out, then, setting course by the first twinkling stars he began to jog-trot across the barren countryside.

There would be no further intervention now; for the villages

slept, and deep in the mountains the searchers ate and rested, telling themselves they would pick him up before dawn.

But before dawn he had returned to the tribe, little worse for the experience of a raid which had ended so disastrously.

As he curled up to sleep he could still hear the faint echo of the Mexican voices as they carried through the hills.

'Geronimo! Geronimo!'

That would be his name. He would recognize no other. And he promised himself it should become as famous—or infamous—as those of the early Aztecs, after one of whom he had probably been called.

He had just won a name. Now it was up to him to win a reputation.

He swore that before he died he would leave a tale to tell. That tale had already begun. . . .

CHAPTER II

THE BLACK STALLION

THE elders of the village recorded Geronimo's birth as about June 1829, in the No-Doyohn canyon region of Arizona. Greater accuracy than that was not required or expected, for many papooses opened their brown eyes during the course of every year, and there were more important things to do than memorize every birth date.

But Gokliya (as he was then called), had perhaps a greater right to recognition than many of his tiny fellows, for in his veins flowed the blood of the mighty Maco, one of the greatest Apache chiefs in tribal history.

So it was to the old man that the news was first brought, and he, veteran of a hundred raids, commanded that the child should be brought before him.

Geronimo's father carried the new arrival to his own father's home and laid it as a tiny offering on the ancient warrior's lap.

At first Maco said nothing. His dark, wizened face was etched deep with many lines that lay like crevasses on cheek and forehead. But his eyes were bright as any bird's, and the onlookers knew at once that he was pleased with what he saw.

The one whose war parties had struck terror into the hearts of every Mexican and settler in southern parts now took one of the child's curled hands. His own were as gentle as any squaw's as he opened the palm and glanced down at its dusky petal.

He traced the creases that would later develop into lines, reading them like a well-defined map.

And what old Maco saw there pleased him greatly.

'My son,' he addressed Geronimo's father, 'Your's is a great responsibility, for this child's future holds much of importance. If he is well trained he can be great among our people, for it is written in his hand that the trails he follows will be long and

many. On those trails he will meet many enemies, even from among his own people. But the signs of greatness are written here. See they are not neglected.'

The old chief picked up the baby and passed him back to his father. The seated listeners rose. The palaver was over.

The baby yawned, blissfully unaware of what had been said over his sleeping head. But Geronimo's father carried him away, uneasy with mixed feelings. The thrill he felt to think that he may well have given the tribe a champion was somewhat marred by the knowledge that the training of such a one would be in his hands alone. He could only do his best, but it was no enviable task, for Maco's fierce old eyes would be upon him constantly.

But like even the most warlike of Indians, Geronimo's father was a dutiful and affectionate parent, and the coming years would show that he was not lacking in his responsibilities.

Whatever the future development of Geronimo the beginnings were right, and if those seeds of greatness finally grew into weeds of tyranny perhaps only the fickle tribal gods could be blamed.

Though the young Apache was Maco's grandson he was afforded no special privileges. In fact as he grew to manhood more would be expected of him in consequence, so his lessons in life had to be learned the hard and practical way.

The simplest games were used for initial training, and daily hours of hide-and-seek made Geronimo more adept at concealing himself than many a fully-fledged brave of another tribe.

But this was only the beginning. Muscles had to be developed, and with them the skill to use a bow and arrow. Eyes had to be taught to see what so many missed, ears to pick up the slightest sound, and mind to translate the minutest sign and make of it a complete and logical story.

It was hard but mostly enjoyable work, though like all educations it had its frustrating moments when progress seemed slow or non-existent.

Geronimo was quick-witted enough, but had more than his

share of the impatience that usually accompanies any outstanding ability.

His father was constantly at his side, demonstrating the skills that every Apache brave was expected to acquire. For though Geronimo never learnt to read or write he was as highly schooled in his own particular sphere as any European of vastly different background.

Together the man and boy would go out on long journeys into the wilderness, and there they would fend for themselves, living off the land.

The boy quickly became accustomed to catching and cooking his own meals, knowing that no one else would look after him, and coming to rely completely on his own initiative.

The hunting instincts that were being developed also kindled Geronimo's keenness to prove his worth before the village.

Though his temper was naturally short he stifled it for the sake of his ambition, working hour after hour, day after day, to accomplish the skills on which his heart was now set.

Old Maco watched proudly from a distance, seeing the boy develop rapidly and feeling that his own instincts had been right.

Some time, perhaps long after he was dead, the tribe would have a leader such as they had never known before. Geronimo's name and fame would live after him, to be told round the fires of future years. At least part of that belief was to prove correct. But it is probably fortunate that Maco did not know which part.

It was a proud day for Geronimo when he proved his worth as a marksman by shooting his first desert rat. These are tiny, kangaroo-like animals, as hard to track as they are to hit. But though his father accompanied him the young Apache found the all-but-indistinguishable trail, hid up, and at last dispatched one of the little animals completely unaided.

On his return to the village Geronimo retold his experiences, colouring them brightly for the sake of his envious friends, who listened open-mouthed to the account.

Under the magic of the boy's vivid imagination it might have been a grizzly bear he had killed, but the feat was enough to earn him the right to wear the tribal loincloth, and become a fully-fledged young hunter in his own right.

He was just seven years old. Naked no more, and with his own small bow and arrow to prove his newly acquired status as a hunter.

Soon there would be bigger game. Antelope, deer, and perhaps even a vicious panther such as the adult warriors sometimes brought back.

Geronimo was afraid of nothing or no one, and had an impressive opinion of his own abilities!

Now the training took a different course. With his prowess as tracker and shot proven he was handed over to the tribal elders, who began to explain the wonders of the skies that, when understood properly, had such practical value.

The stars were there to be made use of, for by their guidance a warrior might plot his way through unknown territory and return safely to his home, many miles away.

This knowledge Geronimo absorbed as easily as the previous teachings, and now began to be instructed by the medicine men in the mysteries of the gods.

Many deities ruled the lives of the Apaches, from the Great Spirit Usen to the wicked immortals who made their appearances in the forked lightning or stalked the earth in a hot wind of drought.

The other boys of Geronimo's age looked on with envy, angry that he should have been singled out for such detailed instruction.

This was not done merely because he was the grandson of Maco, but because he showed exceptional promise, and was therefore to be encouraged for the good of the tribe.

Quickly Geronimo showed that he had no interest in other people's feelings. He was there to make the most of what was offered, for he was already something of a lone wolf—and was to be even more so as the years passed.

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But life was not to be so easy for long. Geronimo had learnt a great deal, but he was still very young when his father died. Now left alone with his mother in the big hump-backed wicki-up, the boy would have to fend for them both.

His education all but complete, he seemed to have been forgotten by the rest of the tribe, and this stung him as much as the pain of the recent loss.

He would show them that he was not to be neglected so easily.

He would prove to them all that despite his years he was a force to be reckoned with.

Was he not a great hunter, who feared no animal? Even his mother smiled when he bragged thus, and at such moments Geronimo felt resentment against the whole world. He was a proud Mimbreno Apache, a grandson of old Maco, who had first shown faith in him, but was now past caring as he sat slowly dying before a sad fire.

There was not a boy in the whole village that Geronimo could look upon as a friend, and though most of the other youngsters respected him greatly there were one or two who challenged his position as self-appointed leader, and showed open animosity.

One of these was named Ponce, and it was through this boy's rivalry that Geronimo was brought very much to the notice of the mighty chief Delgadito.

One day the twelve-year-old grandson returned from one of his solitary hunting expeditions. He was well pleased with himself, for he had bagged three deer, and left them in the far woods until he could return and bring them in.

The first person he saw was Ponce.

On hearing the hunter's proud claim Ponce burst into a roar of insulting laughter.

"Three deer?" he repeated. "Do you expect me to believe that lie, One Who Yawns? You have never killed anything bigger than a kangaroo-rat!"

Geronimo blanched with fury. He knew very well that he

occasionally allowed a healthy imagination to colour his escapades.

But he had never actually lied, for that was a mortal sin in the eyes of every Apache. Now for such an accusation to be thrown at him was more than he could bear.

'We shall see about that.' It was difficult to stop his voice shaking with rage.

'How, O brave hunter?' Ponce's voice was taunting in its serenity.

'We shall fight a duel,' said Geronimo. 'A duel with stallions!'

For a moment the other did not reply. Ponce knew well enough of those duels with stallions that the veteran warriors occasionally fought. It was a dangerous way of settling a quarrel, for it nearly always concluded in the death of one man.

Never before had he known the boys to do such a thing, but now Geronimo had suggested it his pride would not let him back down, and it was too late for apologies.

'Meet me in the wooded valley an hour before sundown; then let it be proved who is the liar!'

Geronimo bit the words out, then turned on his heels, leaving the other wondering if this was only a bad dream.

But the grandson of Maco meant what he said, and intended that he should not be alone in witnessing the humbling of Ponce.

Word rapidly spread among the Apache youths, who took good care that the news of the forthcoming duel should not reach the ears of any elder.

Geronimo returned to his mother's wickiup to make plans, for he had spoken hastily. While Ponce's father possessed many horses and the boy could have his pick of several fine stallions, the poor widowed squaw had none.

Geronimo smiled and shrugged. There was nothing else for it.

It would mean borrowing one!

The youngster did not need reminding that the best horses

were those owned by the great chief Delgadito himself, but there was one animal in particular—a mean black stallion, almost unbroken—upon which Geronimo had set his heart for the coming duel.

If he could ride that brute (and he never for an instant doubted that), the chief's big war horse could be relied on to deal with any beast chosen by Ponce.

But Geronimo was not one for day-dreaming. He slipped out of the wickiup when his mother was not looking, and headed across the village for the home of Delgadito.

On nearing the place he slowed down and moved cautiously, for if he was caught at this stage he would become the laughing stock of the tribe. Neither did he intend being branded as a thief, for when the stallion had served its purpose it should be returned and tethered with its two companions behind the chief's dwelling.

He lay watching for a while in the long grass, a few yards from where the animals grazed peacefully on long halters.

A large roan mare next to the stallion showed that the chief's squaw was inside the wickiup, and before Geronimo could put his plan into operation he had to be sure that the woman was out of the way, and not likely to surprise him.

But the only way to be sure of that was by waiting for her to go out on some errand. He lay there impatiently, knowing that every passing minute shortened the time at his disposal.

Supposing she did not leave the wickiup until he was due to meet his rival in the valley?

He could not go without any horse at all, and anyway the one mount his heart was set upon was the black stallion before him.

Yet to risk being caught taking it was more than even Geronimo dare do.

At last there came a movement from the wickiup, and the watcher saw the woman emerge. She crossed to the small paddock and whistled to the roan mare. The animal lifted its head and then trotted over obediently to the side of its mistress.

Delgadito's squaw mounted expertly and without another glance galloped away.

Now the black stallion was left by itself, and here was Geronimo's chance.

On his first arrival he had been relieved to see that the third horse, a grey hunter, was not there. This indicated that the chief was out on an expedition. But while it made the taking of the stallion easier it also meant that Geronimo would have somehow to conclude the duel and return the animal before Delgadito returned to notice the loss.

But it was too late to think of other issues now.

Geronimo crept out of hiding and ran down the slope towards the stretch of grassland where the stallion grazed by itself.

The catching of the horse was in itself a considerable task, for it knew only its owner, and was even then a far from easy beast to handle.

It was said that only the chief could ever get astride it, and now a strange twelve-year-old was going to attempt such a thing without so much as the customary blanket and bridle.

At least it can be said of Geronimo that he did not show fear, though tough as he was he must have had misgivings as he neared his quarry.

Seeing him, the stallion rolled wicked yellow eyes and began to back away uneasily.

Still the boy came on, holding out one hand until he edged within finger range of the glossy neck and was able to gently pat the coarse jet mane.

Geronimo was just about to untie the halter when he heard his name spoken.

Swinging round, half in fright, he momentarily forgot his mission to see who could have caught him at such an unfortunate moment.

CHAPTER III

THE JOHNSON MASSACRE

A GIRL of about Geronimo's own age was walking towards him, seemingly unconscious of the rearing stallion.

'Get out of the way, the horse will kill you!' His first thoughts were for the girl's safety. He knew her well, and also realized her presence now meant that he was in more serious trouble than ever, for she was Alope, niece of Chief Delgadito.

She laughed, jumping back nimbly to avoid the flailing hooves.

'I have heard much of your prowess, boy. But I did not know you were a horse thief!'

The words stung, and Geronimo knew that his only chance was to explain the mission.

Alope listened intently, and her eyes told him she believed his words.

'Very well,' she said at last, and her voice was soft, 'I understand this is a point of honour, and I shall not stop you taking the stallion—though I ought to try!'

There was a hint of humour in the last few words, but Alope quickly became more serious.

'You will return the stallion as soon as possible, before my uncle comes back?'

Geronimo nodded. 'I'll do my best.'

'But you understand what may happen should anything go wrong during the duel?' Again her eyes probed his. 'I have heard it said that in such forbidden contests the horses sometimes get killed as well as their riders. . . .'

There was no denying that fact. 'If I get killed I shall have paid anyway,' said Geronimo. 'I will do my best to look after your uncle's stallion, whatever may happen.'

'The chief is not a kind man,' went on the girl. 'In such a

case he would treat you as a common thief—and you know the penalty for that.’

‘Yes.’ He paused for an instant. ‘I’ll take the risk—if you’ll let me.’ For he knew that she still had the upper hand, and could if she wished summon help to prevent his carrying out the plan.

‘Go then.’ Alope stood back. ‘Let me see you ride my uncle’s stallion if you can.’ She chuckled, but was soon serious again.

‘My eyes have seen nothing.’

‘Thank you, Alope. You will not regret your decision.’

At that instant he thought how lovely she looked in her buckskin, with the blue-black braided hair to crown her dusky beauty.

But the stallion whickered and tugged on its halter, and all Geronimo’s attentions were turned to the capture of the animal.

Alope watched with interest, noticing how gently he approached it, confidently winning its confidence until the moment came when he slipped lithely across its withers and pulled the halter over its hammer-head to form an improvised reign.

He grinned down at her triumphantly, easily sitting the smooth back as the stallion kicked out.

‘I thought no one but the chief had ridden him!’ There was pride in the words. Alope clapped to see the achievement, excited despite herself.

Geronimo swung the stallion’s head round and cantered off, not daring to look back or wave for fear his success might be short lived through a wickedly-timed buck by the unpredictable animal.

He trotted the horse away in the direction of the wooded valley where the duel was shortly to take place.

A big assembly waited to greet the duellists. Boys of every age clustered in the shade of the surrounding trees, for the word of the forthcoming contest had passed quickly and with the greatest secrecy.

Geronimo held his mount on a tight rein as he walked it

slowly up and down, disdainful of the forest of speculative eyes turned up towards him.

This was his fight, and his alone. The onlookers could form their own opinions as to who might win. He already knew.

There was not long to wait before Ponce was ready. He arrived on a great bay stallion belonging to his father, and rumour had it that the horse had already killed several others in similar contests.

But Geronimo had no time for hearsay. He believed Delgadito's war horse to be more than the equal of any other, and was all set to prove it.

The duellists exchanged signals to show they were both ready, then, turning their steeds towards one another they urged them forward into a charge.

The first impact was terrific. Ponce was nearly unseated, and Geronimo only saved himself by leaning forward and digging his hands into the flying mane of his rearing, plunging mount.

There was little either boy could do now, for the horses had taken over, kicking and biting at each other, forgetful of the riders on their backs.

Had either of the duellists slipped and fallen it would have meant almost certain death beneath those plunging hooves that churned the grass to mud as they wheeled and turned.

More than once Geronimo felt the rush of air past his face that indicated the rival stallion's hooves had only missed him by inches. But Delgadito's horse was more than equal to anything the other animal could produce, sidestepping and counter attacking like a born fighter.

The onlookers were silent, feeling with more than a touch of horror that the affair had gone too far. There was no stopping it now. Before long one of the animals would fall; one of the duellists would be killed.

It was a savage sight, even for young Apaches. But it seemed that nothing could be done. The duel would have to go the whole grim distance, and it could only be a matter of minutes before the first serious injury was inflicted.

The stallions screamed in mutual hate, eyes rolling, teeth showing ugly yellow as they were bared against lathered lips. Geronimo saw first the ground then the sky as his mount tossed him like a black, angry sea. He felt sweat run down into his eyes; his hands were clammy now, and were rapidly losing their grip on the rein. Whatever command he tried to give made no difference to the maddened war horse.

Geronimo needed all the skill he had ever learned as a rider, and though he had often heard of stallion duels he never realized they called for such nerve and strength.

Yet he did not give in. Hoping against hope that he could force Ponce to turn his steed and accede victory, Geronimo struggled on, endeavouring to stop the stallion inflicting any damage on the other beast while himself doing his utmost to avoid being hit or knocked off.

Then without any warning the duel finished. Geronimo's ears were buzzing with fatigue, otherwise he would have heard the whistle that turned the stallion from a savage fighting beast to a tranquil, well-trained animal.

It went trotting across the valley to where a single figure stood holding the reins of a grey hunter.

Simultaneously the meeting broke up. The onlookers scattered among the trees, anxious not to be recognized, while Ponce managed to swing his mount and make off through the undergrowth, leaving his rival to face the consequences.

Chief Delgadito frowned at the boy as the black stallion, sides still heaving with exertion, brought him up. Geronimo found it impossible to face the man's stern eyes. The worst had happened.

He almost wished that he had lost the duel and been trodden underfoot. Anything was preferable to this. He had failed in his promise to Alope, and now would be branded as a common horse thief, one of the worst insults of all, and one which would never be lived down.

'Get off my horse!' Delgadito's words were cold as an icy stream. The boy slithered down the stallion's back and stood

toeing the dust, wishing he could grind himself into the ground.

What dreadful sentence would come next?

Delgadito held the pause until silence seemed unbearable.

Surely the sky would crack with the strain. The wind ceased to breathe, the trees stopped whispering to one another. The world stood still.

Then the chief spoke. 'Why did you take the stallion?'

Geronimo found himself pouring out the story of the deer again. He concluded with the challenge to Ponce, but made no mention of his meeting with Alope.

Delgadito looked down on the boy who was so obviously telling the truth and willing to take whatever consequences his action bore.

'I believe what you tell me,' he said at last. 'But I want proof that you did kill the deer. Such a matter cannot be settled by any duel, but by a trial of marksmanship as I shall now give you.'

Geronimo wondered what lay in store, but his relief was already so great that he was willing to submit to any test the chief ordered. It might yet be that he would escape punishment for stealing the stallion if he acquitted himself well. At least he intended to try.

'Take my bow and one arrow.' Delgadito handed the weapon to Geronimo, who noticed how heavy it was.

Quite different to the light, smaller bow he was used to drawing.

But the chief apparently did not notice that the bow Geronimo now loaded with unsteady fingers was almost as tall as the lad himself.

Delgadito's sharp eyes were searching the distant trees, and soon he found what he had been looking for.

He raised a bronze finger to point the direction, and Geronimo followed his gesture.

'You see the knothole in the bole of that tree?'

Geronimo had to concentrate well to pick out the tiny dark

circular target that his chief had so easily spotted. At last he nodded.

'Then hit it with your one arrow!'

The tree was all of a hundred and eighty feet distant, the bow was a strange one, and too heavy—and Geronimo knew that perhaps his entire future now depended upon his ability to do what Delgadito commanded.

He braced his legs and felt the muscles of his right arm complain as he slowly pulled back the string. Further and further it came, until the feathered arrow nudged his right ear. Now he must be very careful. Taking slow sight he willed the nerves of his body to stop tingling for an instant, and in that instant released the arrow, which sped away with a swish that might have been a sigh of relief.

It sought the target like a live thing, and settled in the centre of the knot with a slap that made the tree shiver.

Chief Delgadito extended his hand for the return of the bow.

'That is good. I believe you killed those deer, grandson of Maco. Go back to your wickiup now and await my summons, for it may well be that I shall have work for you.'

Geronimo did as he was told, hardly able to believe the outcome of the adventure and wondering what fresh excitements lay behind Delgadito's vague promise.

He could only wait as patiently as possible and hope to find out in due course.

During those frustrating days before he saw Chief Delgadito again Geronimo took trouble to learn up much of the tribal history, for he wanted to be able to prove himself worthy of his people in every way, and knew that the elders put much value on learning, for knowledge of the past influenced deeds of the future.

So Geronimo heard of wars that took place long before his birth. He learned of the Mexicans, and of the coming of the first white men.

But what he found out now was to influence the rest of his

life, for by the light of a camp fire he heard from the dry lips of an ancient medicine man the story of the Johnson raid.

'At first the white settlers were friends with our tribe,' explained the speaker. 'We traded skins for beads and cloth that they offered, and were glad of the chance to barter to such mutual satisfaction. But it was too good to last. Among those white men who were true friends of the Apache—such as the great Kit Carson—there were others who sought to take advantage of us, thinking us savages. Those we hated. But there is one name we hate more than any other. That man is a white American trader called Johnson.'

'Why?' asked Geronimo. He was soon to find out.

The old Indian puffed his pipe, savouring the contents. He was not to be hurried.

'When you were little more than a papoose, this man came to our country,' he went on. 'He seemed good and eager to do business, but we soon found that wickedness was in his mind. He did not bring cloth and beads like his fellows, but bottles of magic water that made our braves dizzy and sick when they tasted it.'

'Firewater? I've heard of it.'

The elder nodded. 'The curse of our people, for once having drunk they must do so again, and under its influence commit terrible crimes so that they can obtain more.'

'It is called whisky, isn't it?'

The other nodded again. 'Johnson well knew what would happen, but he was only interested in making much money for himself. For every cupful of firewater that he was willing to give he wanted in return one horse or mule.'

Geronimo whistled softly. 'But those are unequal terms.'

'Indeed they are. Yet that was what he demanded—and what he got, for our warriors had tasted of the accursed stuff, and had to have more, whatever the price.'

'But I do not understand. I thought that we did not have much livestock. . . .'

'That is correct,' said the speaker gravely, 'we have always

been short of good horses, but now our men determined to get them—if only to trade with Johnson for the firewater that turned their stomachs to sickness and their minds to madness. So our tribe began raiding the Mexicans, for their horses and mules were many.

Hundreds were captured and driven back. Soon Johnson had all the valuable horseflesh he needed, while our braves were left with nothing more than illness and headaches. The American became a very rich man, for he sold each animal for ten dollars and bought further supplies of firewater for a tenth of that sum.

But by now our tribe were out of their minds. More and yet more firewater was demanded, in return for which the warriors ventured far across the Mexican border, risking their lives for further livestock, killing and being killed to get all the horses they could to sell to Johnson and his agents.'

Young Geronimo listened more intently still, convinced that the story had some tragic end he still could not foresee.

'You must know,' said the elder quietly, 'that Johnson had made great friends with the Apache chief Juan José, and gave him all the firewater he wanted. The chief was old and could not see that treachery was afoot. He did not even see that his warriors were making great trouble for themselves. But by now perhaps it was too late to stop them, and the Apache raiders made themselves infamous by their attacks on Mexican farms and villages. Always the story was the same—citizens and villagers slaughtered for their livestock, which would soon be bartered for further supplies of firewater.

The Mexican Government became alarmed for its people, and made a great effort to stop our marauders.

At the same time a price was put upon the heads of our people, so that for every scalp brought in by the Mexicans they profited accordingly.

This did not stop the raiders, but it did put another idea into Johnson's mind, and now he took a trip to Mexico to put a plan before the authorities.

'On his return he sought out Chief Juan José, telling him that in order to show his gratitude for all the horses that had been provided the trader intended to stage a great banquet, to which all the Apaches in the vicinity would be invited.

'Word soon passed of this big occasion, and the people who lived near looked forward to the day, grateful for the white man's seeming kindness.

'Johnson had promised many presents, besides further supplies of firewater, and so everyone waited for his return from Santa Fé, when the celebrations could begin.

'When the traders arrived with their promised goods, the warriors set to work preparing the feast.

'Bullocks were killed and roasted whole in honour of the occasion; red and white men drank happily together, while the squaws chatted and fingered the bolts of bright cloth and beads that were distributed among them.

'But in all that happy crowd there was an evil guest. It lay hidden beneath a pile of bulging sacks, so that only its mouth pointed hungrily towards the scene of the feast.

'The big cannon that Johnson had set up at point blank range covered all our warriors, who drank and laughed, not seeing the death that stared them in the face.

'When every tribesman was worse for drink the traders carefully withdrew on a sign from their leader. Then a single roaring report shattered the night.

'When the echoes died away there were only groans from the mortally wounded and the cry of a frightened papoose.

'The white men jumped in, slicing off scalps from the dead which included many women and children.

'Old Chief Juan José had escaped, but before he could get clear to carry news of the dreadful deed Johnson had pulled a gun and shot his "friend" between the shoulder blades.

'Warriors returning from a hunting expedition heard the shot and came to investigate, but when they arrived the white men had gone, taking with them five hundred scalps, which they sold to the Mexican authorities.

'From that day on our people declared open warfare against the white settlers, for it was clear that they could not be trusted.

'Though there are certain traders who have proved their worth there will never be complete friendship between our two peoples again.

'We Apaches have earned a name for cruelty, and now all settlers fear our coming. But is it any wonder that we seek revenge when we remember the night of the terrible Johnson massacre?'

Geronimo did not reply. No words could convey his emotions at that moment, but he inwardly prayed that it would not be long before he too could take the war-path against the betrayers of his tribe.

He sought his blankets with the story as vivid in his mind as if he had experienced it himself, but when he awoke the next morning there was news.

'Chief Delgadito would palaver with you,' said a haughty brave, and the boy followed the warrior to his chief's wickiup, wondering what lay ahead.

He had not been forgotten, but what fresh dangers would Delgadito's promise bring in its wake?

CHAPTER IV

DELGADITO'S RAIDERS

THE news Geronimo learnt from the lips of the Apache chief was of a raid planned against the Papagoes, and that he, the grandson of Maco, had been chosen to accompany the raiders.

This was a signal honour indeed, for a horse raid against a neighbouring tribe was a dangerous affair, and often ended in a running fight.

But the chief knew that the young men had to learn, and there was a rule in his tribe that until each boy had undergone four such trips he could not be considered a likely warrior.

Geronimo was one of the youngest ever to have been chosen for a marauding party, but while he was aware of the honour he was also confident that he would give a good account of himself.

Since his father's death he had continued to develop his capabilities as a future warrior; herding the horses, learning to ride without hands; running from sun-up to sundown without a pause for refreshment.

Such ordeals as these weeded out the weaklings, though Geronimo had not only survived them all, but had excelled himself. That proof, combined with Delgadito's own recent experience of the boy's marksmanship, had decided the chief to give him his first trial under conditions of actual warfare.

Geronimo knew that the coming escapade would not be easy. He could expect scant help from his companions, all of whom would be grown warriors. In fact if there was anything particularly unattractive to do his would be the task of doing it. He must not speak, certainly not offer suggestions; his food would be the scraps uneaten by the others; his constant chore the supply of fresh food while on the march.

They would cover over fifty miles every day, and Geronimo,

as provider, would have to travel much further; stalking game, killing it, and lugging the heavy carcasses back; cooking the meat and watching his companions eat it before being allowed to take what was left.

It was no pleasant prospect that faced him now, but one which every boy dreamed of being allowed to experience. Not one mistake would he be allowed, not one trivial slip that might reveal for an instant the most minute of weaknesses. Apache warriors were supposed to have none, and there was never a second chance of proving their worth.

The particular raiding party to which Geronimo had been appointed was a small one, comprising only the chief himself and four warriors, beside the unblooded youth.

Twelve horses stood near the riders as they mounted their own animals, and Geronimo whispered to one of the braves named Chie, asking why, if they were about to embark on a horse raid, they were taking extra beasts of their own.

'Because,' came the explanation, 'ours may be shot from under us. Then we shall need replacements. If food is short we shall need extra meat, then shall a horse be killed.'

Geronimo nodded, understanding. 'But,' he persisted, 'surely it is not a good thing to take that apaloosa?' He pointed to a magnificent animal with a gleaming spotted hide, that shook its mane impatiently, as if eager to be away on the adventure trail.

He knew that the horse had recently been captured from a medicine man of the White Mountain Apaches. (Every tribe thought nothing of raiding its neighbours, even among the same clan).

For miles around the animal's distinctive appearance was well known, and Geronimo thought it would be the height of folly to take with them anything that would make their presence so obvious.

But stout Chie only winked. 'Wait and see,' he chuckled, and would say no more.

The raiders set out, two braves driving the loose horses far

in front, so that they might tire themselves out and later trot placidly beside the others, for riderless animals could be frisky and unmanageable.

The first day's journey was taken easily enough, with the men talking and laughing together. Geronimo looked from one to another in amazement, for they showed no sign of stealth.

But there was far to go, and Delgadito, like the wise chief he was, believed in letting his warriors enjoy themselves while they may. There would be plenty of time for strict discipline later.

They kept well clear of other villages as they raced across the open plains, and the first night they slept under the stars, with no fire to warm their blood when the chill wind swept the darkness down.

But before dawn they were away again, taking advantage of the half-light to enter the territory that was strange and dangerous to even the more experienced warriors.

The chief took one brave and rode ahead to spy out the land, leaving the others hiding in the shelter of a rocky outcrop.

When he returned Delgadito told his men to tether the animals, and Geronimo was ordered to cut down a small tree, trim and halve its trunk, then stretch a rope between each anchoring piece to form a picket line, to which the loose horses were tethered.

But when the boy had done this and was about to join the others as they made final preparations for the raid, he was disappointed.

'You stay here,' said the chief, 'only warriors go with me now.'

Geronimo was bitterly hurt and very angry, but he knew that it was no use arguing. He watched them go; Chie and Nadeze; Tacon and Sanchez. Somehow he would have to be patient and remain where he was on the boring job of watching the animal line in case of danger that might never threaten.

The day wore on. Geronimo settled himself as comfortably as he could near his charges and dozed. They were in Papago

country now without a doubt, but he could have been back in his mother's wickiup for all the excitement he got !

He did not know what woke him. It might have been a faint spatter of rain from threatening black clouds that rolled overhead, or it might have been some slight noise caused by the two intruders as they weaved their way towards the tethered horses.

The animals stood placidly enough, heads nodding, eyes closed and tails swishing away at persistent flies. They neither knew nor cared that their future, and perhaps their lives, were at stake.

But Geronimo knew that he must do something—and quickly.

Though he had never seen a Papago warrior before he identified the men as such, and guessed what had happened. The rival tribe had kept watch on the activities of the Apache raiders, and when the chief and his men rode off on their sortie, they had decided to steal the horses that belonged to the horse-raiders !

Only one thing could prevent them, and that was prompt action by the boy who had thought his chore was such a trivial one.

Soon they would see Geronimo, and once he was recognized his life would be worth little. They would be forced to kill him before taking the horses.

But he did not intend that the incident should conclude in such a way. Here was a chance in a million, and he intended to make the most of it.

Geronimo seized his bow and began to creep forward, feeling the quiver full of arrows lie comfortably on his back. While he was armed at least he stood a good chance of success.

The two Papagoes had not seen their enemy, so the boy knew that the initial advantage was with him. He crawled carefully to one end of the horse line, lying belly to ground and watching them approach the further animal on the far end.

While the intruders were still some distance away Geronimo set off, sliding beneath the horses' stomachs, hiding in the forest of restless legs that gave cover and a sense of safety.

The Indians drew closer, still not noticing that they were being observed.

Moving slowly and smoothly so that his action should not draw attention, Geronimo reached over his shoulder and withdrew an arrow from the quiver.

He eased his bow up and positioned it, then slipped the bolt in and drew the string tight. When he had sighted the arrow on the nearest man's chest Geronimo released his hold and watched the shaft go winging away towards its moving target.

It caught the Papago just around the heart; but even before he fell dead his companion had taken fright and run away, not stopping to search for the cause or source of the attack.

Geronimo had no time to drop the second man in the way he had dealt with the first, but was glad that his one arrow had done its job so neatly.

Though he intended to be a great Apache warrior, there was something very unpleasant in killing one's first human enemy. Geronimo continued to crouch beneath the horses' bodies, watchful for any further attempt by the Papagoes, but thankful to see Delgadito and his raiders return.

The attack had been successful, and they drove before them a number of fine animals that would be an invaluable addition to the tribe's collection.

Horses were essential to every Indian village and clan, and it was a poor people who had not enough for their needs in peace and war.

So it was that not only the Mimbrenos, but every other tribe was constantly on the lookout for further livestock to replenish its own numbers. This resulted in a series of never-ending raids such as the one that had just been accomplished.

But Delgadito was not finished yet. As he watched his chief's next move Geronimo knew that he still had much to learn about the science of horse-raiding.

The chief was now saddling up the spotted apaloosa, and when the warriors were ready to move off with their captured beasts Delgadito turned his new mount's head in the opposite direction to that which Geronimo expected.

The young Apache was puzzled. He anticipated that they would head back for the village immediately. Instead of which they were riding further into the hostile territory at a time when the Papagoes would almost certainly be out seeking revenge and their captured horses.

But Geronimo knew that he was not allowed to ask for an explanation, and could only keep his eyes and ears open in the hope of satisfying himself on the cause of this strange manœuvre.

He did not have to wait long. Chief Delgadito had himself taken on the task of shepherding the stolen horses, and after several hours of hard riding the apaloosa's spotted coat was flecked with foam, for the animal was very near exhaustion.

Now the raiders stopped. The warriors relaxed in their saddles while their leader slid down from the tired animal and changed the saddle and bridle back to his usual mount.

They rode on again, leaving the apaloosa standing dejectedly behind, making no effort to follow them. The horse was incapable of further exertion, but had served its purpose well.

Chie winked at his young friend. 'You see,' he whispered, 'the Papagoes will soon find the apaloosa. Then they will tell themselves that they know who stole their horses. For that fine animal belongs to the *shaman* who dwells with the White Mountain Apaches. So they will raid our brothers and leave our village alone!'

It was crude and perhaps cruel strategy, but it never ceased to work. Such tricks were practised by every Indian tribe, who had little or no loyalty to neighbours. It was every man for himself, and the most prosperous tribes were those with the least scruples.

But now the warriors were staring expectantly up at the sky,

and Geronimo noticed that the storm which had previously threatened looked more imminent than ever.

Rain splashed on his upturned face, and from the far distance there came a rumble of thunder, like the sound of walking mountains.

The animals' coats became dark with water, their manes sodden and shapeless as they hung their heads and shut their eyes against the first lashing downpour.

But this was just what Chief Delgadito had wanted. Soon the parched earth would be a morass of mud which would conceal the hoof marks of the captured beasts.

Now they would be able to drive the booty back to the village, knowing that with the assistance of the rain and the Papagoes' ultimate discovery of the spotted apaloosa there would be nothing to fear.

Geronimo returned to his mother's wickiup feeling proud that he had taken the first steps to becoming a veteran warrior, though he knew there were three more major tests to be passed before he could actually claim that honour.

But he had killed his first enemy, and won for himself two fine horses, which the chief presented to him as his part of the prize.

He felt inclined to seek out Alope and tell her of his recent experiences, but decided that it would be better to wait until his growing reputation preceded him. Being of a conceited disposition Geronimo found this difficult, for when he had set his heart upon anything he could not wait until it was his. Two big ambitions now ruled his life; becoming a full Apache warrior and taking Alope for his wife. He knew all too well that if he had voiced either of these desires he would have quickly become the laughing stock of the tribe, on account of his youth, size and lack of experience.

But those would all develop one day, so he forced further patience upon himself, to whom it came so unnaturally.

Soon there would be another test, and when it came he had to be ready.

It was on the second raiding trip that Geronimo distinguished himself by a feat which needed no lavish recounting to show it as the act of undoubted bravery that it was.

He was hunting meat, and had so far been unsuccessful. Resigning himself to the fact that his companions would have to sleep hungry that night, Geronimo turned to retrace his path through the foothills.

But an unexpected barrier stood in his way. A snarling, spitting thing that dared him to pass. The boy eyed the full-grown black panther with respect, for he knew that such a mountain cat was among the most dangerous animals to be found in the whole land.

He stepped back a pace, watching the great beast wrinkle its lips in defiance. But Geronimo had no intention of being turned from his path, and besides, he had noticed something else. Just behind the panther lay a freshly killed deer. It was obvious he had surprised the cat while it had been dragging its kill back to a hidden lair deep in the hills.

Geronimo knew that his warrior-companions needed fresh meat, and saw here a chance—though admittedly a dangerous one—of getting it.

He slipped the hunting knife from his belt, knowing that it would be useless to try and draw an arrow on the creature that threatened him only yards away.

He was right. Hardly before the knife was in his palm the panther sprang, landing with a thudding jar that knocked the breath from Geronimo's slim brown body and sent him rolling in the dust, with the weight of the furry beast upon him.

At first he felt he must suffocate beneath the attack, but he managed to roll to one side and swing the knife. It caught the flanks of the roaring animal, but at the same instant Geronimo felt a warm wet slash that cut deep into his chest.

Again they struck, boy and beast; and again each found his target, though not fatally.

Geronimo felt himself weakening, and fought to finish off the contest before losing too much blood.

When the panther momentarily lifted its head the young Indian saw his chance and took it. He plunged the sharp knife deep into the thick throat, praying that he had found the right spot.

The beast's roar died to a cough as its strength ebbed. Soon it flopped on to one side and lay there, streaked with dust and blood—dead.

He picked up the slaughtered deer and somehow staggered back to camp, where his wounds told their own story when he fainted at Delgadito's feet.

The second test had been accomplished, and there was nothing now that could prevent Geronimo achieving the warrior status on which his heart was set.

He was seventeen, but in those few years had shown greater courage than many braves of twice that age.

Now he had fought, tracked, raided, shot—and killed. There was nothing in which he had been found lacking.

The tribe gathered. Chief Delgadito picked up the traditional cloth band and beckoned the youth to him, placing the ornamental head-dress round Geronimo's forehead.

He was a warrior at last, for he had proved himself to Delgadito's raiders and before all his people.

Somewhere in the dense crowd a girl called Alope watched, and her heart was happy, for she believed this to be the start of a long trail together.

CHAPTER V

THE PRICE OF A BRIDE

THE old Mimbreno warrior No-po-so sat half-asleep before his fire, a thin curl of smoke from his blackened pipe the only indication that he breathed at all.

Nearby sat his wife, a wrinkled squaw of similar age, huddled in her blankets as though not wishing to admit the presence of her husband—or indeed the rest of the world.

Somewhere within the walls of the family wickiup was Alope, their daughter. Strange to think that those two Apache villagers should be the parents of such a lovely young girl—but perhaps equally strange that she, with all the eligible young men of the tribe at her feet, should already have given her heart to Geronimo the braggart.

A shadow fell across the ground, and the young man in question stood, arms akimbo, before No-po-so. The old man appeared not to notice, but his wife huddled deeper into her blankets with a grunt and a frown, as though something unpleasant had disturbed her reverie.

Geronimo, still flushed with his acceptance by the chief, had come for his bride.

Among the tribe there was no question of falling in love, or of asking for a girl's hand in marriage. The warriors of the plains did not believe in anything that was not purely practical, and considered that everything had its price, including live-stock and women.

A girl was a commodity just the same as an animal, they reasoned, and should be treated as such. In fact, it was the squaws who held the future cradled in their arms, for each male papoose produced was another potential warrior to swell the strength of the tribe.

Geronimo knew that the opening of the deal was up to him,

so without wasting either words or sentiment he came straight to the point.

'I will give you one horse for your daughter. That is more than she is worth, for am I not the bravest of all Mimbreno Apaches?'

It is possible that had No-po-so known how to laugh he would have done so. But he did not even smile. The silence which greeted Geronimo's offer did not deter the boy. He was out to make a bargain, and such a transaction could not be hurried, lest he gave away more than he intended. And no woman was worth very much, he reminded himself.

'It is a good horse,' he announced, resuming his original line of attack. 'A stallion that will sire many more. . . .'

This time his words did produce some result. The elderly squaw coughed loudly and began shaking her head until her bead ornaments clattered around a stringy neck.

Geronimo gathered that his first offer was not acceptable, so began to play the game according to his preconceived plan.

'Then I will give you two,' his voice rose almost to a shout before he corrected himself impressively.

'No, not two—but three of the best horses in the village—and all of them mine!'

He waited for a result, and this time at least he got one.

No-po-so and his old wife opened their eyes, scowled at one another and then began to shake their heads in unison before seemingly dropping off to sleep again.

Geronimo came close to losing both his temper and his instinct for bargaining.

Now he had to buy Alope at all costs, and did not pause to think that this was just what the wily old warrior intended.

'Name your price for the girl,' Geronimo challenged. 'For I am no ordinary brave, and can afford more than any. Am I not of royal blood, and shall not one day I be the most fearsome of all Apaches?'

No-po-so made no attempt to answer the youthful boasts, but took full advantage of his strong position in the deal.

He opened his eyes again and turned his tortoise face towards the young suitor.

'Twenty horses shall be enough,' the ancient replied casually. 'Bring them to me here and the girl is yours.'

For once Geronimo was taken off guard. His overbearing manner dropped abruptly, as did his lower jaw, and he stood staring at the speaker, still not believing that he had heard correctly.

'You said . . . twenty horses?' he repeated.

No-po-so nodded slowly. 'I think so,' he said softly.

'Or was it perhaps thirty? Not that it matters to one of your wealth! At any rate, bring me a score of prime animals now and we can talk about the others later. . . '

A cackle from the old squaw made her husband look up.

Geronimo had turned on his moccasined heels, and was striding away, every line in his body visibly protesting against the bargain that he had tried to make and so badly lost.

There was not a single youth who could raise ten horses for a girl, let alone double that number. Alope would remain in her home wickiup for a while longer yet, until one of the rich headmen made a similar offer.

Their daughter's future did not interest No-po-so and his squaw, but the prospect of additional wealth did, and they minded not from whom it came.

Inside the hide walls the girl had been listening. She recognized Geronimo's voice, but although she guessed his errand could not distinguish the words.

There came a chuckling squawk of victory from her mother, then silence. Alope dropped her eyes to the skin-covered floor, guessing what had happened. She felt as though she had died before beginning to live.

The hot anger that Geronimo felt at the outcome of his bargain soon dissolved into logic. He saw clearly now that if he wanted Alope he would have to pay the price. That her father

hated him was obvious, for No-po-so had opposed his admittance into the Council of Warriors.

But both of these factors only made Geronimo keener to have his own way. Somehow he would collect twenty horses and present them to the old warrior in payment for his daughter, and as proof that he, the young Geronimo, was not easily bested.

But twenty horses, he realized only too well, took some finding.

There were fine animals enough in the Apache village, but they were owned by warriors and their families, and even Geronimo drew the line at stealing from his kinsfolk.

(Not perhaps so much because he believed it morally wrong, but because it was a heinous crime in the tribe, and if caught, would mean banishment for life).

Only one alternative remained, and that would have been quickly dismissed by most other youths, no matter how badly they needed to buy the girl of their choice.

The Mexicans had plenty of horses for the taking—but it so happened that the nearest settlement was over two hundred miles distant. Two hundred miles of the most difficult country; two hundred miles over which troops of hostile Mexican cavalry would be patrolling, on constant watch against the hated Apache marauders.

Those factors did not deter Geronimo. He had to have horses, but also, he was forced to admit to himself, he had to have assistance.

He determined to choose carefully, lest careless tongues blurt out his plan and he become a laughing stock of the village.

He was a proud and solitary young brave, and that made it all the harder to solicit help.

But though the idea was distasteful he finally approached two youths a few years older, but both of whom had in the past shown respect for his powers of leadership.

Pedro Gonzalez—Mimbreno despite his Mexican name—and the pure-blood Zayigo listened carefully to Geronimo's

suggestions, watching with the narrowed eyes of concentration as he drew a crude map in the soil.

Finally, when they had heard all, they rose, nodding satisfaction.

'It is good. We shall come,' agreed Gonzalez, in whose veins flowed the blood of the Mexican arch-enemies, but who did not like to be reminded of that fact.

'When do we leave?' was all that Zayigo said.

The three slipped away that night, taking only their blankets and a few necessary weapons such as knives and long-barrelled guns.

Geronimo vowed that none should know of their going, and only on their return should all see the result of their escapade. Even he realized that this was no time for bragging—or old Nopo-so might raise his price still higher!

By sun-up they were miles away from the village, travelling at a mile-eating lope.

They rested and refreshed themselves sparingly, increasing their speed when possible yet never overtaking their reserves of strength, great though they were.

At last they came to the border that divided Arizona from Mexico, and only then did they hold a council of war to discuss the position.

Geronimo had a natural sense of direction, and from the moment they had left the village had set his eyes on a far distant ranch where he recalled from past experience having seen a large number of fine horses in the corrals.

The last few miles of the long journey had brought the three braves within easy reach of this outfit, and now, as the first purple shadows of approaching dusk began to fall over the spring landscape marking the end of another burning day in 1846, Geronimo's face showed rare satisfaction as he lay watching the scene below.

Gonzalez nudged Zayigo when he saw a group of Mexican riders skirt a cluster of adobe outbuildings, driving before them a herd of pedigree horses.

For this sight alone the hazardous pilgrimage had been worthwhile—though how much more satisfying to think that before long some of those horses would be accompanying them on the return journey.

But there was no hurry, and certainly Geronimo did not intend making a mistake at this late stage and running the risk of being discovered. Time enough for that later when they would have to take their chance.

The golden balloon of sun became a leaden ball, dropping behind a distant mountain range, and by its obscurity plunging the world into sudden mauve darkness.

The trio began to move carefully, easing limbs that had ached into numbness, rubbing dust-dazzled eyes which had stared for hours at the little beings that came and went below.

But now the ranch was seemingly deserted. Herd after herd of horses had been driven into the corrals and locked in for the night.

Then the Mexicans had gone, bow-legged and thirsty, to the bunkhouses.

The coast was clear at last. Geronimo rose to his feet, taking care that his silhouette did not stand out stark against the skyline.

No need to look further, he had decided. All the horses he needed were there below, and his for the taking.

But that taking must be done cleverly, or he would not live to present his part of the bargain to No-po-so.

He gestured his companions nearer, and as the first coyote howled to a rising lantern of a moon the intruders crept out to begin their task.

Gonzalez and Zayigo, acting on previous instructions, headed straight for the ranch buildings, to keep watch while their leader dealt with the horses.

Geronimo knew exactly what he intended to do. He collected three bridles from where they hung with a knot of leather harness on the rail of the nearest corral.

Soft-footed as a fox he ducked beneath the fence and en-

tered. The animals inside rolled nervous eyes and backed cautiously away from the stranger, but they did not whicker a warning, as Geronimo had feared they might.

Making the most of his opportunity he slid forward, coaxing a bold grey, sidling up to it and patting its mane as he slipped the bridle over its unprotesting nose.

Twice more he repeated this manoeuvre. Now at least the three Apaches had their mounts, and it only remained for Geronimo to take as many horses as he required and lead them out on the long race homeward.

But things did not continue as easily as that. The Mimbreno raider glanced quickly up, hearing a sound from the nearest building.

A door slammed open, leaving a white light from somewhere inside flaring out into the darkness. A figure reeled out, singing in a drunken voice. If the Mexican saw him and gave the alarm. . . .

Just then a shot echoed through the night and the song stopped abruptly. One of the other braves had also seen the danger and acted upon it.

But the horses were scared now; milling round the corral and shying nervously at their own shadows. Before long they might be completely out of control. Geronimo had to act now or it might be too late.

He threw himself astride the big grey, feeling its flanks quiver expectantly beneath his heels. Then, grabbing the bridles of the other two horses he rode towards the corral gate. Instinctively the other animals followed. Geronimo leant down and unlatched the gate, kicking it far back. In a broad dark stream the horses poured through to freedom.

The shots that fizzed through the night caused even Geronimo to feel a twinge of panic. The other Mexicans were coming to the aid of their dead or wounded companion.

Not even the skill of three Apache horse thieves could match the assault of more than twice their number, better armed as the *rancheros* certainly were.

If the Mimbrenos did not fall to flying bullets they could easily be cut off and captured, once the Mexican horsemen regained their mounts and gave chase, for under such conditions the stolen herd would only slow down the Indians' progress.

But Geronimo had no intention of either being caught or losing the horses he and his friends had come so far to take.

He eased the grey into a trot, at the same time calling to his friends. They came at once, running before a hail of spasmodic fire that emanated from the ranch buildings. Zayigo grabbed the reins of one loose horse, and Gonzalez took the leathers of the other.

Then they were away, galloping from the scene of their crime like shadows born of the night. And like shadows they would disappear before the coming day.

Geronimo saw his friends on their way, then swung his steed back towards the corrals. He did not mean to leave the Mexicans any chance of pursuit, and saw here an ideal opportunity to improve upon his own plan of campaign.

The Mexicans were already running towards the corrals, but they moved on foot, with all the awkwardness of horsemen who dislike being separated from their mounts.

The Apache easily outstripped his enemies and was back before they guessed what was happening. He cantered along the front of the enclosures, slipping open gate after gate, until every horse whinnied and joined the rapidly-growing herd of their companions that galloped, squealing for freedom.

By the time the Mexicans realized what had happened it was too late. They stood, harness in hand, ready to saddle up their mounts—but saw those same animals kicking up their heels in the light of a rising moon, and careering off in the wake of a slim dark figure that rode as if part of his steed.

Geronimo had won the day, for pursuit was now impossible.

Many hours later those pedigree ranch horses were cropping grass peacefully alongside the shaggy Indian ponies. The graz-

ing was lush and extensive, and they cared little for the rights and wrongs of human ownership.

On his return with over a hundred head of bloodstock Geronimo ignored the acclamation of the tribe.

He immediately sought out No-po-so. The old warrior and his wife sat before their wickiup as before. In fact they appeared not to have moved since their previous encounter with the young brave.

But now they were forced into some semblance of acknowledgment. Behind Geronimo stood not twenty, not thirty, but fifty fine animals. A bride that few of even the most prosperous warriors could have afforded.

The brave said nothing, for he despised the old couple that were to become his parents-in-law. He gestured to the animals, then called in the direction of the wickiup.

'Alope! Come out, for I am here.'

The girl appeared, her brown eyes large with surprise at the sight before her.

Then she ran across to take his hand. Geronimo had gained the wife of his choice. There was no stopping him now.

CHAPTER VI

TREACHEROUS TRUCE

THOUGH Geronimo, after his own fashion loved his wife Alope dearly, still more did he love the war-path of his savage ancestors.

Leaving the young squaw in the Apache village with a small family of two daughters and a son, Geronimo roved far and wide, blazing his own trails of infamy, and on more than one occasion, disaster.

But it was early in the year of 1858 that an incident occurred which was never to be forgotten by the Indians, and which made them hate their traditional Mexican enemies even more than ever.

On this occasion a great redezvous had been planned, in order that the various Apache clans could meet and exchange goods and greetings with distant relatives.

The most central and obviously suitable place lay in the heart of Mexico, and in order that the Spanish-speaking peoples who waged constant war against their red-skinned rivals should understand, Apache envoys had been sent out to seek permission. They explained that the meeting was to be a purely friendly one, which, by the amount of trading to be done, could only benefit the local inhabitants.

So sanction was granted by the Mexican authorities and the settlers from outlying farms came to watch the townspeople as they rode in to the redezvous.

Whole villages of Mimbreno Apache left their lands to converge on the appointed place, and though for safety's sake they carried guns and sharp knives among the pelts and stores they rode past the wary Mexican homesteaders as though they did not exist.

It was hard to believe that until comparatively recently those two races had been at each others' throats, but perhaps not so

difficult to realize that at the slightest excuse or misunderstanding the temporary truce would be shattered again and fresh blood spilt into the hungry desert sands.

On rode the Apaches, and with them Geronimo and his family.

Even the younger children rode ponies of their own, but though the Mexican farmers suspected that many of those animals had at one time or another been rustled from their own homesteads they were helpless to do anything about it, for an armistice had been declared, and must be respected as such.

So the Apaches swarmed in from every direction, family after family, clan upon clan, to meet their relatives and blood brothers, to barter and to talk; seemingly oblivious to the tinder-dry atmosphere of Mexican hatred, ignorant of any hidden threat which could so easily blaze into tragedy.

Casas Grandes, in the state of Chihuahua, was the township which was to act as trading post, but most of the Apaches erected their own wickiups at a tiny settlement a few miles out, intending to ride backwards and forwards daily, having as little contact with the Mexican townsfolk as possible.

The first day of trading in Casas Grandes moved quietly to its conclusion. Though the Indians and Mexicans eyed one another with bitter and mutual dislike no untoward incident marred the long sunlit hours of barter, when crude gold exchanged hands for bright blankets, and sturdy little pack burros were traded for supplies and provisions.

Geronimo and his fellow braves had turned and were riding back to their families when one Indian happened to see a movement in a gulley by the side of the track.

The Mimbrenos galloped over, sliding from their horses' backs before the animals drew to a halt, looking down with stern faces at the badly wounded Apache who lay gasping on the ground.

Geronimo recognized the earth-brown face of his friend Pedro Gonzalez, now grey from exhaustion and loss of blood.

He crossed to him, propping the limp head up gently on one knee.

'What has happened, brother?'

It was a little while before the other could reply, and when he did his breath came in painful bursts through punctured lungs.

'The Mexican soldiers came to the village,' one weak arm gestured towards the horizon, beyond which was pitched a cluster of Mimbreno wickiups.

Geronimo's dark eyes burnt with a deep fire of hatred.

'Go on, my friend.' But he knew what Gonzalez was going to say next.

'They came as neighbours, under the guise of seeing that we were comfortable, and had plenty of water.'

The listeners glanced from one to another, deep lines of apprehension carved on those usually unexpressive countenances.

Gonzalez continued, his voice now becoming stronger with urgency.

'The *rurales* asked where our braves were, and we replied that you had gone into the town and that we were looking after the women and children until your return.'

The men looked down at the speaker, not daring to encourage him for fear of what they might hear next. But there was no avoiding the horror to come, framed in their stricken comrade's own whispered words.

'The Mexican dogs saw that this was true, but not until they were quite sure did they strike. Then they turned upon us with their guns . . . they shot down the women first before turning on the little ones who tried to run for shelter. The other guards and I did what we could, but it was pitiful, for we were hopelessly outnumbered. I believe that no one but myself can have survived the massacre.'

Each Apache warrior who heard that concluding sentence knew its full import. They were now alone, bereft of their loved ones, in a hostile land where each passing hour might see their own deaths.

All that was left in their numbed hearts was loathing for the cowardly ones who had perpetrated such an outrage.

Geronimo knew that they would have to act quickly if they were not to fall into a similar trap. The country outside Casas Grandes would soon be alive with prowling Mexicans (if indeed it was not already), seeking to pick up straggling Apaches and finish them off before they could give the general alarm.

One mistake the enemy had made was to think that there were no survivors of the massacre, but Pedro Gonzalez warning would be in vain if the outlying Indian villages were not alerted. Perhaps even now similar atrocities were taking place. . . .

Chief Mangas Coloradus had to be found and told of the sudden turn of events. There would be no more *fiesta* in the town now.

Every Mimbreno would have to fight for himself and his surviving relatives. And the long road back from the rendezvous might at any hour develop into a blood bath of treachery, which was all the truce could have meant to the Mexicans.

No use yet to go back to the scene of the crime, for Geronimo guessed that the Mexican soldiers would remain there in hiding, hoping to wipe out the returning warriors, taking them by surprise before they had a chance to sum up the situation.

'Listen my brothers,' Geronimo addressed the others in a low voice. 'We must separate now to warn the other villagers. But let us return here after dark, bringing more warriors. Before many moons have waned the Mexican dogs will regret today—if they should be alive to do so!'

The wounded Mimbreno was lifted on to a horse, then the braves dispersed, each picking his own path through the brush.

Any single Mexican who happened to be in that area just then was not to be envied.

It was a weird, deserted land that Geronimo and his fellows travelled that day. Village after Apache village was empty,

with fires still smouldering and wickiups still erected, as though awaiting the return of the Mimbreno hunters.

But there were no hunters, neither were there squaws and children squatting or playing before those cooking pots which now boiled dry.

The Apaches were scattered as corn before a destroying wind.

They were either dead in haphazard bundles among the alien country or had fled for safety, seeking in desperation others who might be in the same plight and sought to rally against their cowardly attackers.

The Mexican soldiers, probably thinking their surprise attack more than successful—which indeed from their point of view it was—had evidently withdrawn to Casas Grandes, confident that the Indians would slink away and not dare to venture into hostile territory again.

Geronimo found it hard to restrain himself from setting out in open search for his enemies and shooting as many of them down as possible before he himself was killed.

But he knew such tactics would be futile, only playing into the enemy's hands. The Apaches needed all their strength and cunning now, and every brave who rallied to the midnight rendezvous would be of immense help when the day of retribution finally dawned.

Darkness had reigned for several hours by the time the survivors returned, bringing with them others who had been found in the vicinity, lost and bewildered by the tragic turn of events.

The Bavispe River shone like beaten silver behind the cluster of shadowy figures as they stood and squatted near their horses, the sole remaining tribesmen of a huge cavalcade of clans that had trekked so far to meet their death by Mexican deceit.

Fortunately, Chief Mangas Coloradus was one of those who had escaped with their lives, and it was to their great leader that every Apache now looked.

Geronimo, lone wolf that he was, realized that at such a time

the guidance of an experienced warrior was essential if they were to claim the final victory in what had so far been a sadly unequal battle.

But Mangas Coloradus gave his listeners little hope of immediate success. He turned a deaf ear to the excited pleading of his young braves, whose one thought was to set out immediately and attack the Mexican town.

'It is not good, my sons. To do that is to throw our lives away.'

His words were sad, but confident in their sorrow.

'Why should we wish to live, when our loved ones have all been slaughtered?' An angry voice cut through the night, ringing sharp as a released arrow from its twanging bowstring.

'Because only in life can we hope to succeed,' returned the chief. There was no further argument, but the listeners heard with sinking hearts the news that they would make the most of the dark hours to ride out of Mexico and back to their own pastures without so much as a token retaliation.

Though Mangas Coloradus was a wise chief, he knew it was asking a lot from his hot-blooded braves to do this, but he insisted, and his command was not challenged again.

Quietly the warriors returned to their horses, mounted, and awaited their leader's last instructions. The words came as a surprise, and certain relief.

'Before we ride, my sons, I want you to return to the villages that have been massacred. Make sure that no one lives—but first make equally sure that no *rurales* still await our coming. If you should see any, do not let them escape to tell of our coming.'

After a short silence that was its own grim promise, Mangas Coloradus concluded.

'Say a last farewell to your loved ones, bidding them goodbye in our traditional way.'

The warriors nodded, understanding, then wheeled their horses and raced away into the brush without another word, welcoming, yet dreading this last mission.

Geronimo was alone when he reached his wickiup. He had planned this deliberately, because whatever the danger that might threaten there he wanted no assistance in the ritual of the long farewell.

The moon showed the scene all too clearly. The empty dwelling, the dead fire, and the pitifully small bodies that lay scattered over the clearing.

One by one he picked them up, carrying them carefully into the wickiup, and placing them, as though in sleep, on the soft floor of spread skins, which only recently they had all shared together.

Alope, little bigger than a girl herself, he laid next to his own mother, and then the three children.

It must have been pitifully easy to kill them all, he knew.

The few sentries that were left in camp could have been decoyed away before the Mexican soldiers struck.

Not even the sound of gunfire would have penetrated the distant noisy township, where the trading was taking place.

He hoped it had soon been over; for his own sanity forcing himself to believe that.

Geronimo turned from the wickiup without a final glance, dedicating himself to the life of hatred that lay ahead.

Carefully he let the flap down over the door, then drew his hunting knife, which flashed fitfully as he used it in the darkness outside.

Stack after stack of brushwood was cut down and carried to the wickiup where it was carefully piled round the sad little place of death.

Only when the dry vegetation almost completely hid the home did Geronimo cease, wiping cold sweat from his forehead with the back of his free hand.

Sliding the knife back into its sheath he felt for steel and tinder, then knelt by the hewn brushwood and touched a spark to its parched fringes.

The tiny point of light hopped like a little live thing from

branch to branch, leaving a bright tail of flame that spread rapidly into a brilliant mass of peacock-plumed fire.

Geronimo stepped back, his taut face illuminated in the sudden glare that now surrounded the doomed wickiup.

There was no smoke, for he had done his job well. The cascade of sparks that showered into the dark sky told their own story.

Somewhere behind a horse whickered, and the solitary Mimbreno turned to mount. He rode away, leaving the animal to pick its own path, relying on the instinct that told it where the others might be found, already setting out on the long trail home.

Only when he had caught up several of his companions did Geronimo pause again. Now he saw that they had been climbing into the rocky foothills of a mountain range. Behind them lay Casas Grandes and the Mexicans who were doubtless celebrating their success.

Some way between the township and the beginning of the foothills other points of light fluttered their golden flags.

Wickiup after wickiup, village after village burned away, destroyed relentlessly by the same hands that had so willingly erected them such a short time before.

By dawn there would be nothing left but ashes. The Mexicans would see this and laugh, believing that they had rid themselves for all time of their Apache foe.

But the hatred that had been engendered still remained, a permanent threat to those who now thought themselves safe, and well rid of the tawny-skinned vermin.

The Apaches would be back to seek their revenge, but the empty countryside slept, keeping that knowledge to itself.

At that moment perhaps only Geronimo guessed what violence the future held.



CHAPTER VII

THE COMING OF COCHISE

AFTER returning to their homeland, the Mimbrenos quickly began to rally their tribal clans. Puffs of smoke in a cloudless sky showed that signals were passing from hill top to hill top. By night throbbing tom-toms told their own stories of the Mexican betrayal and called warriors to arms from the furthest parts of the countryside.

They responded with a will, and soon Chief Whoa, of the Nedni Apaches, and Cochise of the Chiricahuas were on the trail that would lead to the Mimbreno encampment and a grand war council with Mangas Coloradas.

It is interesting to note that originally the Apache and Navaho tribes were one and the same, dividing during the course of years to develop different characteristics and areas of habitation.

About this time the Apaches had become a tribe in their own right, winning recognition and respect by their notorious skill as raiders and guerilla fighters.

The clans of the Apache tribe were divided roughly into two divisions, one being located in the mountains and on the verge of the Great Plains east of the Rio Grande.

These were the Jicarilla, Mescalero, and Lipan groups; called by their Mexican enemies *vaqueros* and *llaneros* (buffalo hunters and plainsmen).

The second division comprised the Coyotero, Arivaipa, Pinaleno, and Chiricahua clans, who had made their homes round the headwaters of the Gila River in southern New Mexico and Arizona.

Of these peoples the Chiricahua was the smallest tribe, but what it lacked in numbers was more than made up by the ferocity of its warriors and the fame of its chief, the famous Cochise.

Inevitably the name of Cochise was to become linked with

that of Geronimo as champions of their race, but as yet they were still to meet. While one was an accepted leader the other had not yet earned the position he fought so hard and constantly to acquire.

When only eighteen Cochise had been given the chance of ruling the far-flung Apache tribes, but he was wise enough to realize that this was all but an impossibility and might well result in the weakening of their combined strength.

Far better, he decided, for each tribe to have its own leader and remain a self-contained unit which would be harder to put out of action.

So he remained with the Chiricahuas, only leaving his home territory when a serious emergency threatened.

But at last they met, those three warrior chiefs. They spent long hours in discussion, deciding the best way to attack the ones who had so cruelly done them wrong. Days, weeks, and even months passed before they were mutually agreed upon a suitable plan of campaign and had rallied all available warriors to their cause.

But at last all was ready, and once more the Bavispe River had been chosen as a rendezvous, the only difference being that now it was a prelude to battle instead of a sad epilogue to defeat.

The three tribes of Mimbrenos, Chiricahuas, and Nednis were to bear the brunt of the fighting, with all lesser clans seconded to their aid.

So it was Cochise, Whoa, and Mangas Coloradus on whom the responsibility for all decisions lay. Geronimo was glad of this; it gave him the rare opportunity of hearing most of the secret plans, for he was held high in the esteem of his own chief, besides being a friend of Naiche, son of Cochise.

Now the men were stripped and painted for war. They were unhindered by women and children, who had been hidden in far-off canyons under the care of a few old warriors. The Mexicans would never find them there, even if the worst came to the worst and the attack resulted in an Apache rout.

Finally six hundred picked warriors set out on the trail of revenge. Mangas Coloradus led two hundred, including Geronimo and his companions who had suffered directly at Mexican hands.

Chief Whoa of the Nednis brought a hundred and fifty valuable fighters, and Cochise contributed the balance to complete the impressive force.

The horses were fresh and trained for action, and the blades of spear and knife had been sharpened as seldom before; for the Apaches meant business.

Geronimo and Naiche had formed an instant and mutual liking at their first meeting, and now rode side by side with the Mimbreno contingent, inseparable companions, hoping to fight and if necessary die together for their nation's cause.

The advance into Mexico began with each of the three tribal divisions moving separately, yet not far enough away from their companions to be out of reach should sudden danger threaten.

All went according to plan until the river was reached. There the clans collected, pleased with their progress, and confident that no Mexican bugle had yet sounded the alert. Even a large body of Indians found it easier to move more discreetly than a single troop of the swarthy cavalrymen whose duty it was to patrol the countryside.

But then, the Mexicans were remarkably lazy and unobservant, resting when the sun was high and sleeping through the night when their enemies were abroad.

Now the intruders waited for news, and it was not long in coming.

Apache sentries reported the approach of a figure from the direction of Casas Grandes, and Geronimo crawled forward to a vantage point on a high boulder to have a look.

He recognized the man immediately as one of their own, a spy who had been sent out some weeks previously to glean what information he could in the heart of the hostile town.

Although a Mimbreno, this spy's appearance was unques-

tionably Mexican, due to his father's marriage with a captured settler. But like many of his fellows of similar stock, he showed no loyalty towards the hated Mexicans, and was only too pleased to be picked for the dangerous task for which he was obviously suited.

A donkey and some stolen clothing were easy enough to procure, and so the Indian had come and gone much as he had wished, making acquaintances among the unsuspecting Mexicans, and learning much that would be invaluable to the Apache warriors when their time came to strike.

Geronimo signalled down for the guards to let the newcomer in, and personally accompanied the man to Mangas Coloradus, anxious to hear what he had to say.

The chief listened with interest, for the spy's words were valuable indeed.

'There are no *rurales* in Casas Grandes now, but their horse-and foot-soldiers—there are two companies of each—have been moved to Arispe in the state of Sonora.'

The Mimbreno chief nodded slowly, formulating a plan in his active mind.

Though the Apaches were noted for their vicious raids upon unguarded settlements it never occurred to them to make such an attack on Casas Grandes, which they could undoubtedly have wiped out easily enough. Though they sought revenge it was upon the men who had killed their families, and as those forces had now been transferred it was only natural that the Apache wolves should follow the scent.

And they would continue to do just that until they had made their kill.

The other two chiefs agreed with Mangas Coloradus, and so the three tribes set out again. But now they went on foot, for even they, born scouts that they were, did not find it easy to disguise the presence of their high-spirited horses, so the animals remained behind, well hidden by overhanging foliage and guarded by a handful of tribesmen who would have them ready for immediate flight should such a necessity arise.

File after file of near-naked warriors slid from the rendezvous. Geronimo took the lead, his friend Naiche trotting quietly by his side. The young Mimbreno had been appointed guide in preference to more experienced warriors on account of the several trips he had made into Mexico alone.

He had a wonderful memory for foreign parts, and every hillock or strangely shaped tree told its own story to one whose eyes were keen and perceptive enough.

Long had he awaited this moment, and the past year had been spent in training himself mentally and physically for the chance to revenge himself against the murderers of his family.

He had even sought training as a medicine man, hoping that the knowledge acquired would assist him in the understanding of his human foes.

But now it was as a killer, not a healer, that Geronimo set out, blanket slung over one shoulder and lance in hand.

For over three days the Apaches marched, during which time they made no single false move to give their presence away, though by now they were deep in the heart of enemy territory, and surrounded on all sides by the Mexicans they had come to kill.

Only when Arispe lay below in the light of a dying sun did the tribesmen halt, hiding themselves in the shadow of a thick wood whilst they looked down on their goal.

The old walled town looked quiet enough in the heat of the tired day.

But the Apache chiefs did not allow the scene to lull them into any false sense of security, neither did they have the slightest pity for the townsfolk as they went about their daily tasks. Those people had killed Indian families ruthlessly enough, and though they did not know it were about to settle a long outstanding debt.

Having decided on a plan of action the three chiefs strode purposely to the summit of an overhanging cliff. There they would be quickly spotted by sentries and soon the town would be in a ferment of anxiety. From the Mexicans' position it

would be impossible to judge just how many Apaches might be ranged against them. It was more than likely that the enemy would believe Arispe entirely surrounded.

It was a cruel, cat-and-mouse game that the Apaches proceeded to play, but they were bitter men, and cared nothing for the niceties of civilized warfare (if such a phrase is not paradoxical enough in itself!).

Sure enough it was not long before the Indian leaders were seen.

Shouts rang out, echoing up in the evening air, mingled with the braying of bugles.

Arispe quickly became transformed into an ants' nest of little black scurrying forms, panicking as they guessed the full portent of those still, menacing figures high on the bluff.

Geronimo squatted before the chiefs on the edge of the cliff, waiting and watching for some movement from below that might determine the enemy's tactics.

It was not long in coming. Shortly before sunset a flutter of white appeared at the main gate, accompanied by a movement from a small cluster of men who moved out on foot, away from the town walls.

Geronimo rose, pointing to the flag of truce.

'They come to parley,' he said, forcing himself to respect the courage of anyone who could march unarmed against an unknown horde, for the sake of their fellow citizens.

But he choked back pity, for there had been no Mexican equivalent when Alope had died.

Cochise stood, arms folded on his broad chest, surveying the scene with evident satisfaction.

'Let the *rurales* come closer,' was all that he would say, and not even his fellow-chiefs knew what was in his mind at that moment.

The Apaches waited, edging forward to the fringe of the wood to see what would happen next.

The Mexicans climbed slowly towards the spot where their attackers waited. Minutes slid reluctantly by, and only when

the visitors were nearing their objective did Cochise speak again.

'Send out warriors to bring them in.'

Geronimo turned to repeat the order, and from the encircling trees a group of dark forms emerged, like lengthening shadows on that fateful evening.

It was a little while before the Mexicans saw the Apaches, and by that time the flag party was almost surrounded.

Then the *rurales* did the worst thing possible. Instead of attempting to talk to the Indians they drew closer together and felt for the knives that Geronimo now saw in their wide sashes.

The Apaches made no attempt to attack until one of their number fell to his knees, tearing at the blade that had flashed through the air to penetrate deep into his throat.

After that there was no holding the Indians. Even if they had been armed with guns the Mexicans would have stood no chance against the savage onslaught which followed.

While the warriors almost literally tore the enemy to pieces the three chiefs looked on imperturbably. There was nothing they could do to stop the carnage, and none of them respected the sanctity of a once-white flag that was now torn and red.

Nothing more happened that night, but it was certain that the townspeople saw or guessed the fate of their envoys. Now they would be planning some sort of counter attack.

But the Apaches in the woods were unconcerned. They lit their fires and eagerly anticipated the coming day which promised the action for which they were all so impatient.

Cochise and Mangas Coloradus knew that now the defenders of Arispe would make the first move, and this was not long in coming.

Shortly after dawn a Mimbreno sentry reported that a troop of some twenty *rurales* had left the town and were galloping for the trees.

This seemed a foolhardy enough manœuvre, but doubtless the Mexicans were banking on the fact that they carried guns,

and could keep well out of range of the Indians cruder weapons while they circled the wood, firing repeated volleys into its interior.

But in actual practice the idea did not work out so well.

Fusillade after fusillade went crashing through the trees, tearing down leaves and small branches, but not one Apache was hurt.

The Indians dodged lithely from trunk to trunk, easily evading the assault of the clumsy cavalry, and the soldiers were allowed to canter away after spending much energy and ammunition in their futile little sortie.

But more interesting news was in store for Cochise and his friends. A swift-riding Nedni reached camp during the late afternoon, sliding down from his mount's bare back and running across to where Geronimo and Naiche were on guard.

'Brothers,' the warrior gasped excitedly, 'I have seen it with my own eyes——'

'Seen what?' Geronimo sensed something unusual was afoot.

'Take your time, friend.'

But the other shook his head. 'There is little time to spare, it will soon be upon us——'

'Cease your riddles then, man,' Naiche shook the messenger impatiently. 'Tell us—or let your chattering teeth speak for you!'

The Apache pulled himself together. Swallowing hard to quell his excitement and steady his voice, he pointed back in the direction from which he had so recently ridden.

'Back there,' he began, 'a Mexican supply train is coming.'

Geronimo and Naiche exchanged significant glances. If the warrior spoke truth, which neither of them doubted, this unexpected occurrence could prove of inestimable assistance to the Apache campaign.

Supply trains, consisting of many mules loaded with arms, ammunition, and stores, plied between every large trading post and settlement. The Apaches knew from past experience the plunder that could be gained by taking such a prize. In the

present situation the food and weapons would be invaluable, enabling them to continue the siege on Arispe as long as they wished.

On the other hand, should the train get through to the town, the Mexicans would have valuable reinforcements in both men and materials, and the Apaches might find that added strength too much and be forced to retire without having achieved their objective.

Geronimo knew that they would have to move quickly if at all.

That supply train had to be taken at all costs.

While the chiefs completed their plans the unsuspecting Mexican travellers drew steadily nearer. . . .

CHAPTER VIII

GERONIMO THE OUTCAST

FOR warriors well skilled in the art of ambush and swift attack the capture of the supply train presented few difficulties.

Taking care that the engagement took place well out of sight of the township, the Apaches drew their quarry into the trees, and there launched themselves against the terrified Mexicans, who stood no chance of escape, and scant will to retaliate.

This coup was accomplished by a group of Apaches who showed themselves at the side of the trail which led round the forest.

On sight of their painted enemies the traders took fright and bolted for the nearest cover; and there, with the trees to hamper their movements and stifle their cries, they died.

It was neatly, if brutally done. None of the inhabitants of Arispe knew that assistance had been so near, and that with the caravan's elimination they were now in greater peril than ever.

The Indians were well satisfied, and helped themselves to all the supplies, arms and ammunition they required.

Geronimo handled a heavy muzzle loader, eyes glinting with pleasure. He had always wanted to fight the Mexicans with their own weapons, and to him it seemed only justice that he should be given the chance of killing the murderers of his people in this manner.

Long before the *rurales* came again the Apaches were ready.

Night passed and daylight dawned, filtering greyly through the trees beneath which the warriors still sheltered.

Geronimo lay on the edge of the bluff watching the town below.

He saw the gates open again, to disgorge a horde of well-armed soldiers. Two companies of infantry spread out across

the plain and began to work up the hill towards the forest that formed a heavy green crown on the summit.

Behind them another two companies of cavalry waited, watching the proceedings.

Geronimo knew that it would be the foot-soldiers' task to winkle out the Apaches from their stronghold, after which the horsemen, on their swift mounts, would ride them down and finish them off.

That at least was the theoretical plan. In actual practice it worked out very differently.

Geronimo had been given the leadership of the front rank of warriors, upon whom fell the responsibility for repelling the initial attack.

The fact that the Mexicans had now chosen to take the initiative was not lost upon the three Apache chiefs, but they shrewdly believed that this hinted only at desperation. At all costs the enemy were determined to keep their town safe from the marauders who, once inside, would show no mercy.

Geronimo watched the *rurales* creep closer. No exchanges had yet been made, and so, although the Mexicans believed the Indians to be watching from the shelter of the trees, they still did not know the exact position of the Apache warriors.

Determined to make the most of this fact, Geronimo ordered his friend Naiche to take fifty of his own braves to a projecting strip of forest that sprang like a giant spur from the main area.

'Wait there,' the young Mimbreno ordered, 'then when I give my war-cry, show yourselves. There will be plenty of game for your hunters before long !'

Closer still came the *rurales*, and still there was no sign that they had been seen, or indeed that any living thing inhabited the woods on the bluff.

The Mexicans paused, perhaps losing their nerve and not caring to make the final charge that would bring them into the fringe of trees, unsure of what might await them there.

An officer rapped out a command, and ragged rows of long-barrelled guns were aimed towards the hidden watchers.

Only when the first volley had been fired did Geronimo act. As the soldiers knelt to recharge their muskets, he saw his opportunity.

With a triumphant yell he led his band of Mimbrenos to the attack.

The Mexicans looked up in alarm, caught completely off guard. There was no time to finish the reloading process now, neither was there time to run back to seek the protection of the cavalry.

The *rurales* drew swords and prepared to sell their lives as dearly as possible to the blood-mad warriors who now swept towards them from their hiding places in the wood.

Soon a desperate battle was taking place on the higher slopes of the hill. Men were locked in mortal combat on the cliff edge, and more than one such struggle ended with both parties plunging over the precipice and down to the rocks far below.

The mounted men outside Arispe saw what had happened to their companions and set out to charge the raiders and force them to retire.

But Naiche timed his manœuvre well. Just as the mounted *rurales* came abreast he led his own party from cover. Firing with the stolen guns the Apaches unhorsed many of the newcomers. Those who escaped found themselves being followed by swift-running warriors, who caught hold of stirrup-leathers and pulled themselves up behind.

Hunting knives flashed as the remorseless Indians dealt with one after another of their hated enemies.

They grabbed the riderless horses, and led by Geronimo, screaming the dreaded Apache war-cry, swept down on the helpless town.

The people of Arispe saw all that had been happening and knew that they could not avert the ultimate tragedy. The cream of their fighting men had gone, and now the town lay virtually open to the savage marauders.

They were trying frantically to shut the main gate when Geronimo and his companions arrived.

A hurtling lance pinned one man to the wood, another missile knocked over a second Mexican, while a squealing horse trampled him underfoot.

Geronimo saw a barricade ahead and put his mount at it. The animal leapt, kicking the obstruction away with its hind hooves—and the end was in sight.

Backwards and forwards the Apaches rode, in and out of the narrow streets, sabreing with heavy Mexican cavalry blades every living soul they saw.

It was massacre—just as the Apache women and children had once been massacred.

And then, suddenly as they had come, the invaders turned and stormed away, leaving in their wake a razed and ruined township.

The three chiefs gave Arispe no further thought. It simply did not exist any more. Their revenge was complete.

But during the following years the Apaches had more to occupy their time than the frequent raids into Mexico.

Other strangers were coming to their land, not swarthy-skinned ones like the Spanish-speaking peoples, who were cowardly as coyotes and had no real heart for war.

These newcomers called themselves Americans—as though the Indians themselves were not the real Americans!

They came to parley with the tribes, and like all races, some were good and some exceedingly bad. And as in all such situations it was the evil in man that seemed to prosper, so that the Indians were forced to rise in open rebellion against those who had victimized them.

Against this unfortunate background came the news that was to cause more trouble than any in the hearts of the already distrustful Apaches.

A white official by the name of Bartlett travelled from Washington to approve the boundary line that it was proposed to institute between Mexico and the United States.

A war with Mexico had been fought and won by the pio-

neers, many of whom had their roots deep in the heart of other countries far overseas—Scotland, Ireland, France, Holland, and one called England, which had once looked upon America as one of her own colonies.

But with the division of territories the Apaches found that all their lands now belonged to the white strangers. No longer were they free to roam at will over the great wild pastures; no more could they look upon each soft sky-lined-hill as their own.

Now they were little more than prisoners, allowed to live in their homeland by the courtesy of those who called themselves civilized.

It was not unnatural that the Indians resented this very bitterly. They had been born there, and the land was theirs by right, not by might.

Even the hated Mexicans were better off. At least they had been allowed to keep their own country.

Mangas Coloradus, chief of the Mimbrenos, was essentially a good man. Though he had no hesitation in taking reprisals against those who had violated his trust and hurt his people, he did not wish for needless bloodshed.

For many weeks his simple mind toyed with the problem of how to persuade the surveyors to leave what he believed to be his own country. At last he had an idea, so calling Geronimo to him, the veteran warrior said,

'You will go out after dark, shadowing these white men who move so freely about our land. When they sleep in their blankets you will steal some of their horses. Before their work is finished they will have no animals left, then they will have to go back home. Do you understand?'

Geronimo understood well enough, but he despised the chief for his plan. In the upstart brave's code there was only one way to deal with unwanted strangers, and that was to kill them before they could do further harm.

He said this often and forcibly enough, but Mangas Coloradus only shook his head and smiled.

'You are wrong, my son. Disputes cannot always be settled

by force alone. When the white men see they are not welcome in these parts they will surely leave us alone, just as they have done the Mexicans.'

Geronimo shrugged. It was useless to point out that these same white men had first of all beaten the Mexicans in battle. The same thing must surely happen to his own race. Therefore they must strike first, to gain the initial advantage.

But Mangas Coloradus would have none of it, and Geronimo was forced to do his chief's bidding. He worked through the following nights with hate simmering in his heart, both for the pioneer surveyors, led by Commissioner Bartlett, and for his own chief.

'One day,' he swore, 'I shall be more powerful than that old fool who calls himself a Mimbreno warrior. Then the white men shall feel fright at the very sound of my name. When I ride out it will be to kill the oppressors of my people!'

Shortly afterwards Bartlett left. Coloradus nodded with pleasure when he heard the news, confident that his subtle hint had been taken.

The white men would not come again. The Apaches could live in peace.

But at that moment Bartlett was making his report to Washington.

The surveys had been completed, the boundary fixed—and the pioneers were free to drive down into Indian country, settling where they wished.

Mimbreno scouts quickly brought back the news of the lawless invasion, and Geronimo bared his teeth in a bitter snarl of disgust.

'We have been betrayed again,' he said, 'first by the Mexicans, then by the white strangers—and now by our own chief!'

His companions heard these words in a shocked silence, for so well was the elderly chief respected that no one thought to defy his commands or show disgust in such an open fashion.

But Mangas Coloradus behaved as though he did not know of the enmity that Geronimo was slowly building up among

the younger and more hot-headed braves of the Mimbreno tribe.

The chief now realized that his first peaceful attempt to drive the white men away had been a failure, but still saw no need to resort to force.

Force was kept for such people as the Mexicans, but as yet the pioneers from the north had shown no hint of this.

When they did the Apaches would retaliate, but to the last Mangas Coloradus believed that there might be a peaceful settlement to the problem.

A tribal meeting was called, at which the chief outlined his beliefs and set down a standard of conduct for his people.

'War comes easily,' the warrior's face was stern as he spoke. 'The Mexicans are our mortal enemies, and that will always be so. They are as dangerous as wolverines, and experience has proved that any demonstration of trust is to our own disadvantage. . . .'

A few heads turned as Geronimo rose from where he had been seated and strode, back towards the speaker, away from the meeting place.

Several youths followed him, but Mangas Coloradus appeared not to have noticed.

Only when they were well out of earshot did Geronimo stop, rounding on the others, who noticed that his eyes flamed yellow with fury.

'Does the old fool think that we are women?' Geronimo fairly spat the words at his companions. 'When white strangers come to steal our lands and herds are we to sit watching, like squaws before the fire?'

Though there was still no reply Geronimo sensed that he had made an impact, and spent no time in following it up.

'If we are to remain true warriors we must resist the white men. We must strike first, killing as many as we can before they kill us. We must burn their houses, steal their horses, and drive them back before it is too late. Who will ride with me in this?'

By now he had thoroughly captured his audience, and a clamour of eager voices answered the appeal.

Geronimo looked round with dissatisfaction. 'We are not enough. I must have more braves to lead on the war trail!'

A voice rose from somewhere at the back. 'Others will join us when we have set an example. Once our raids have been proved successful there will be no shortage of warriors, for they will see that you are the greatest chief of all!'

Nothing could have been better calculated to put the finishing touch to Geronimo's self esteem. If before he had had any doubts that he might be unable to break away from the tribe and lead a band of his own marauders it was now dispelled. Hate spurred him on, and he believed that he could do anything, even in the face of his people's disapproval.

'Then let us ride!' he cried, swinging up into the saddle of his restive horse. 'We shall not sleep until the scalps of the first frontiersmen hang at our belts!'

The group of action-starved young warriors followed their self-appointed leader out of the Mimbreno encampment, openly disobeying their chief's command.

Mangas Coloradus heard of Geronimo's going. The chief's face set in deep lines of grief, for he knew that now nothing could avert the national tragedy that lay before them.

Soon the whole country would be immersed in a terrible blood-bath, for which Geronimo must take his share of responsibility.

The chief's voice was heavy with sorrow as he thundered: 'From this day let Geronimo and his pack be declared outcasts!'

But the human wolves neither heard nor cared, as they thundered on towards a remote homestead, screeching like things possessed.

Somewhere within his stout log walls a grizzled pioneer looked at his wife, knowing that terror had come and that death would soon follow.

Then Geronimo the outcast struck.

CHAPTER IX

THE WAR GODS AWAKE

FEBRUARY, 1861. Much had happened since Geronimo had been cast out from his tribe and taken the solitary trail of destruction.

Despite the gangs of Apache marauders who followed Geronimo's example—and there were many—the white pioneers continued to flock into the Indian lands in ever-increasing numbers.

The wise ones among the Apache, such as Mangas Coloradus and Cochise, realized that this mass immigration was as inevitable as it was uninvited. They could do little about it save meet the influx with typical racial dignity and hope that some form of alliance might be reached whereby both nations could live side by side in comparative peace.

But it was not easy. The American frontiersmen were greedy for easily-won wealth, and the land offered that in more ways than one.

With the discovery of gold in California a string of coaching stations was established, each post being supplied with accommodation and extra horses for the steady stream of long-distance vehicles that was expected.

Miners and pioneer families packed the rattling coaches when they came, and more than one reached its station with a badly wounded driver and arrows piercing the sun-bleached wood of the cabin. Grim proof that either Geronimo or some of his wolves had been on the prowl.

When this happened Coloradus or Cochise would send out a band of Apaches to track down the outlaws, for though Geronimo and his kind had every reason to hate the white newcomers, their's was no way to settle such a dispute.

But the Indian raiders were never caught, for they knew the methods of their own people, and found it easy to evade them.

Apart from the marauders, who were generally dreaded by the pioneers, the immigrants found their red-skinned neighbours to be well worthy of respect.

True enough, the Apaches were hard to understand, but they were honourable according to their own code. They believed in taking an eye for an eye, and this the newcomers quickly found out. It did not pay to try and cheat the Indians, though they would willingly enough respond to fair treatment and offer the same in return, if not actual friendship.

Now the forts started to go up, great rambling buildings with walls thicker than any arrow could penetrate. Uniformed cavalry took up duties, their job being to protect the pioneers from the depredations of the outlaw Apache bands that lay eternally unseen and unsought behind the nearest horizon, ready to strike again as they wished.

But though the United States Army looked impressive enough with their fine horses and the latest in firearms, they were mere tenderfoots when it came to scouting the territory.

The men lacked nothing in courage, but had much to learn when it came to Indian fighting, and Geronimo never tired of illustrating this.

Time and again a troop of weary riders would return to the safety of their fort leaving several of their number where they had fallen in a skirmish, staring at the sky with glazed, unseeing eyes.

Again Geronimo would have triumphed, and again would a fresh ripple of fear flood through every pioneer heart.

Now the immigrants began to be trigger-happy, firing indiscriminately at every strange Indian, even before he had a chance to show that he came in peace.

It was a most unhappy state of affairs, and one which appeared to worsen with each succeeding day, when sudden death stood like a real thing behind every man's shoulder.

Fresh to this situation came Lieutenant George Nicholas Bascom, on his first posting since leaving military academy at West Point. The young officer was not overawed by the tales

he had heard or the advice of his more experienced elders. In fact, like so many of his age, he believed that here was a heaven-sent opportunity to demonstrate his military genius.

The incident which triggered off the whole terrible turn of events was a small enough one. Perhaps under other conditions it might have led to nothing more than a minor skirmish, but, because of Bascom's zeal and inexperience it blew up into one of the greatest storms that had ever darkened the plains of war.

Micky Free, a half-breed Mexican boy had, it seemed, been kidnapped by one of the marauding bands. (In this instance at least, Geronimo, was not to blame!) Added to which the same Apache raiders had stolen several head of cattle from one of the staging posts.

Bascom frowned conscientiously, and summoned a troop of cavalry, ordering them to be prepared to spend several days away from barracks, until the culprits were brought to order.

One of the more seasoned sergeants shook his head doubtfully.

'That kid may be an officer, but he don't know the country, nor the type of Injuns we're dealing with. Be lucky if we ever see a fort again, mark my words!'

The other troopers did mark his words, and echoed them apprehensively enough. They knew that anything could happen out there where the rocks carved grotesque designs on the broad backdrop of sky. The least they might get away with was an arrow between the shoulder blades. They cared not to know what the worst would be.

But they were soldiers, and could not disobey a command; even from a kid officer straight from high school, with the froth of sarsaparilla still on his lips.

So they rode out through the heavy wooden fort gate, past the bugler who sounded taps, past the flag of Old Glory as it fluttered down on a whispering wind.

Somewhere outside there the Apaches were waiting. Perhaps even now the riders had been seen and were being trailed.

But the young Lieutenant Bascom did not seem to mind as he sat his fine bay horse, riding like a toy soldier, unaware that war was anything but a children's game.

The troopers murmured uneasily together when they learnt that they were heading for Apache Pass, for that place was one of the most notorious in all the land, already noted for its savagery.

It was situated high in the Chiricahua Mountains, forming a link between them and the Dos Cabezas range which adjoined the eastern side.

The pass was innocent-looking enough, and provided a fine broad trail along which wagon trains could roll until the end of time (always providing there were no hidden ambushers lying in wait).

The coarse shrubs and towering cacti that fringed the pass constituted the only vegetation in that arid area, but at one point there was a little oasis of greenery that surrounded some of the sweetest spring water in the territory. It was there that many a pioneer knelt to drink—and never saw the reflection of his Apache killer who lurked on the far side of the water.

The Overland Stage Company had built a sturdy stone house there, but the place was now deserted and derelict, for no agent would live in Apache Pass when the tribes were on the war-path.

That then, was what awaited Bascom and his troop at the end of their ride, and the young lieutenant must have been the only one who looked forward to unsaddling with any degree of confidence.

But though the men constantly looked round, eager fingers on triggers, all seemed quiet enough.

It was a mystery why Bascom had chosen to aim for the pass, but perhaps in his illogical enthusiasm he considered that the raiders who had taken the horses and boy would have gone that way.

Much more likely that they had given the place a wide berth,

and were at that moment galloping off in quite the opposite direction. But it was no good suggesting that to the new officer.

So on went the army, positive that it was shortly to make a fool of itself again. And in that it was not far wrong. But the foolishness in this case was to lead to more terrifying things, and put back the relationship between red man and white many a long year.

Unfortunately, as it turned out, Cochise himself was in the vicinity of Apache Pass when the troopers arrived. The great chief, with two of his nephews, was riding over the brow of a hill nearby when one of the Indians caught sight of the cavalry below.

The younger man pointed down. 'Do we attack before they have seen us?' (He knew that though they were but three against treble that number they could easily cause great havoc among the soldiers from their hidden position high above the trail.)

Cochise shook his head. 'No, my son. They are doubtless here in peace, as are we. Let us ride down and welcome them.'

Though the Chiricahua leader was not afraid to fight he wisely saw that the good name of his people depended upon their just dealings with the interlopers. There were plenty of hot-heads like Geronimo who attacked first and asked questions afterwards—or never.

So the three Apaches rode slowly down towards the approaching horsemen, hands raised in their racial gesture of friendship, and apparently oblivious of the troopers as their hands moved towards sheathed carbines.

Cochise introduced himself, but not a flicker of friendship crossed the scowling face of Lieutenant Bascom.

His voice was as ungracious as his appearance. 'We've been looking for you, Injun.'

Cochise raised his eyebrows. He had hardly been expecting such a greeting, but said nothing, allowing the other to continue.

'What have ye done with the boy?'

'What boy?' Cochise's voice betrayed no emotion of any kind.

'The Mex kid ye kidnapped,' went on the officer. 'An' come to that, where have ye hid those cattle your renegades rustled?'

'We know of no such thing.' The Chieftain raised his fine head arrogantly. 'These are no dealings of ours, white man, and you insult me when you accuse be of such behaviour.' Cochise spoke truly enough for Micky Free had in fact been abducted by a band of Pinal Apaches—distant relatives of the Mimbrenos and Chiricahuas.

Bascom was coming very near to losing his temper. In his mind there was no difference between one Indian and another. He did not choose to remember the fact that the three Apaches had appeared to them unarmed and willing to parley, when they could so easily have shot several of the troopers down from their lofty vantage point.

'All right,' the officer swung round to a sergeant. 'Take 'em!'

Before Cochise or his companions knew what was happening they were surrounded and unarmed. Their complaints were lost in Bascom's next command.

'Pitch a tent fer the night an' put the prisoners in under guard. We'll take 'em back to the fort tomorrow fer trial!'

Cochise anticipated the sort of trial he would get at the hands of such a raw soldier, who cared nothing for the niceties of the law. Clearly he regarded himself as an Indian killer, and only the fact that he was out for speedy promotion saved Cochise's life just then.

Bascom was all set to create an impression on his return to the post, leading a chief and two warriors as prisoners, accused of a crime they knew nothing about.

But the lieutenant's plans were shattered later that night by a shout from one of the sentries.

'The Injun's got away. Cochise is loose!'

And indeed he was. Though the discovery was made before his two relatives could join him, the chief slipped through the

ring of searching troops, away from the firelight, and into the shadows of the nearby pass that loomed like a giant arrowhead to carve a nick in the rising moon.

The lieutenant began to be uneasy now, and believed he had gone too far. Anything might happen before daybreak, and his more experienced sergeant rubbed in the warning.

'He'll make fer their nearest village an' bring back warriors. They'll rescue the other two an' wipe us clean out!'

Bascom had to admit that possibility, but he did not relish the long ride back to the fort through country that was capable of yielding a hundred hostile warriors.

He decided that the only alternative was to see the night out, and the soldiers did so, with doused fires, itchy trigger fingers, and eyes that uneasily searched the blackness for the slightest hint of danger.

But none had come when the first grey mists of dawn enveloped the higher ridges of Apache Pass.

'What's the varmint up to?' murmured one trooper. The only reply came as a curse on the officer who had initially put them into such an unenviable position.

When Cochise did return it was with a proposition. The cavalry was still encamped near the pass when a lookout spotted an Indian standing high on the rocks above them, within shouting distance of the soldiers.

As the Apache's words floated down Bascom listened with a face darkening more with every passing sentence.

'Chief Cochise wishes to parley. In his village are two American prisoners, and these he is willing to exchange for his nephews whom you have so unjustly imprisoned.'

The lieutenant rose quickly and strode to the edge of the camp, cupping his hands round his mouth.

'Tell your chief to go to hell! I'll never let these two Injuns go—but if he doesn't release our men immediately, I'll come and git 'em.'

Those by Bascom's side saw the folly of his words.

'If you'd be guided by me, sir——' began the sergeant.

Lieutenant Bascom rounded on the man furiously.

'You're here ter take orders—not give 'em. Any more of this an' I'll have ye put under close arrest, along with those red varmints. Understand?'

The sergeant did understand. He also understood that they were in for a lot more trouble before the next few hours were through.

And in that he was right enough. Cochise himself came to parley, standing like a statue on the edge of the pass, and bringing with him the two white prisoners he sought to barter for his own nephews.

The soldiers saw their fellow troopers, captured on a previous occasion during a skirmish with an Apache band. Now the men stood helpless, hands bound behind backs, and thongs securing elbows to their sides. Another length of rope also passed between them to a warrior, so they stood no chance of escape.

The inaccurate random shots that had been fired up to the Indians ceased when the troopers saw their own prisoners, for they feared the Apaches might take their revenge upon the helpless men.

However, the first reprisals came, not from the Indians, but from the American troops themselves.

Failing to force Cochise to his will, Lieutenant Bascom called to his sergeant.

'Fetch those tarnation Injuns out here. We'll show 'em we mean business!'

Several troopers looked at one another uneasily, guessing what was coming, and dreading the consequences.

But Bascom was lost in his own anger. He searched for a tree, and was soon satisfied with a stunted specimen that grew near the camp, and well within sight of the watchers on the rocks above.

'Now bring a rope!' The proceedings must have been well understood by the two warriors who stood powerless among their white enemies, but the captive Apaches gave no sign of fear.

The two American prisoners saw what was happening and set up a clamour of response, pleading with the officer to stop, or they would have to suffer the consequences.

Lieutenant Bascom was now a man beyond all reason.

He curtly ordered the Indian prisoners to be strung up before their distant tribesmen's eyes. The troopers had no alternative but to obey, though they knew that by such a cowardly deed they not only sentenced their companions to death but thousands of other innocent pioneers and frontiersmen as well, for the Apaches would not take such treatment lightly.

Cochise watched the proceedings, immovable as a figure carved from the rock on which he stood. Only when the bodies of his nephews hung limp and still, strange fruit on the end of the hempen stalks, did he turn to his fellow warriors.

'The white man has chosen,' the chief's voice was firm, despite his sorrow. 'Let us show him that we understand his ways.'

Shouting with fright the American soldiers were seized. They knew that they would have to suffer the same fate as their tawny brothers-in-sorrow, but there was nothing that could be done to save them.

Bascom must have gone cold with horror when he realized how his own passions had back-fired upon him. Instead of returning in triumph now he would find it hard to meet the eyes of his senior officers. Even the silence of loyal troops would be its own indictment against his inexcusable behaviour.

But the Apaches had acted according to their code. Life had been taken for life.

Yet this was only the beginning, Cochise swore that now he would never forgive the white trespassers for their behaviour.

'Let the war drums sound, send the news from tribe to tribe,' his words were coloured with terrible foreboding. 'When the sun has risen five times let every Apache in the country assemble before my lodge, ready to fight for our people, for it shall be a war to the death.'

And as the Apache runners spread far and wide across the land, carrying their dread news, there came a distant rumble. It might have been thunder or a slight earth tremor.

But the Indians knew that their war gods were waking at last.

CHAPTER X

THE SCALP SEEKERS

FROM all parts of Apacheland they came; warriors flocking to their chief's call. Long before the sun had risen five times the tribesmen were massed over a thousand strong.

Then the war council sat. Cochise summoned the leaders of the other clans, and together they discussed the future. It seemed now that there was no room for both races in the same land. Either the white men must go or the red men must give up their heritage and be content to live as slaves beneath the rule of the newcomers.

There had been mistakes on both sides. Geronimo and several others of like character had taken the law into their own hands, and were already proving of considerable embarrassment to the settlers whom they so consistently attacked.

But the behaviour of Lieutenant Bascom had been unforgivable in Apache eyes. Geronimo had been outlawed by his own people, but as they saw it the young cavalry officer and those of his kind were actually paid by their government to perpetrate such outrages.

Therefore Cochise decided that the situation must be determined once and for all. But still the great chief did not rush into any hasty conclusion, and conferred with his fellow leaders for many hours before facing the vast assembly to inform them of the decision that in the circumstances could be the only one.

'It is war between the white men and ourselves.'

The crowd heard the verdict in grim silence, knowing the worst.

Eager as the tribesmen were to fight the white intruders they did not imagine for one moment that it would be anything but a long and deadly affair.

They had bows and arrows, swift ponies, and all the skill of

woodcraft, but the enemy had guns—some mounted on great broad wheels, and armoured forts which would be hard to broach.

It would be a battle of wits against one of might, and many warriors would die before the final surrender was called.

But to give in now was to sacrifice their homeland, for the frontiersmen had just shown that they respected nothing, classing all Indians as potential killers.

Cochise addressed his people with a voice full of quiet confidence.

'The white strangers must be driven out, but there will be no great massacre. We must show them that their only chance is to leave our land. They will fight back, be sure of that. But for every one of our warriors that dies ten of theirs shall perish.'

The last sentence was a carefully deliberated statement rather than any idle boast, and one which was to prove sinisterly effective.

Soon the countryside would be sprinkled with Apache warriors, tribesmen who kept watch on every solitary trail, every single remote homestead, every cavalry patrol, every fortified post, ready to swoop down and attack on orders from their war-leader.

Puffs of smoke on the horizon that might be dismissed as small clouds by less observant eyes would carry their secret code of messages; casual sticks and stones at the fork of a track passed further news of the enemy; the faint flicker of distant fires on a dark night were signals easily understood by unseen watchers who waited to pounce.

So the big Apache campaign was planned and put into operation.

Though the Indian forces were powerful they never struck in any number, preferring to follow Geronimo's example and ride down on homestead or wagon trains with no more than ten, fifteen, or perhaps twenty whooping warriors to encircle the victims.

Then, sharp as a flash of lightning the warriors would strike and disappear, leaving behind them utter silence and a trail of smoke that told its own sinister saga.

Authorities in Washington panicked as the news of the rising spread, and further military detachments were drafted to the scene of the trouble.

Now the Apaches were threatened with a very real menace.

Cochise realized that the troops might aim at the Indian villages, and so he intensified his warriors' attacks in order to keep the cavalry from finding or taking reprisals against the wickiups of his people that were scattered across the countryside.

If a troop looked to be nearing a tribal village they were at once drawn off and found themselves fighting at a disadvantage against the strategy of so-called savages.

But now, with war openly declared, Geronimo came into his own.

Not only was he no longer an outcast, but his help had been requested by the chiefs who had once banished him.

He grinned at his followers on hearing this.

'Now we shall show them, the white fools and the old women who call themselves chiefs! The tribes cannot do without Geronimo, for I am the greatest war-leader of all! Saddle up, brothers, for tonight we ride!'

Again and yet again the Geronimo band swooped, leaving behind them a blazing trail of ruin.

Hatred for the white men burned deep in Geronimo's heart, but love for such grisly work undoubtedly played its part as well.

He had only some thirty warriors at his side, yet nothing daunted those fast-riding devils, as they swept over the plains, laying waste wherever they went, like a plague of scarcely-human locusts who fed on the blood of their fellow beings.

Arizona knew them, to its cost, and the still-wet scalps that dangled at the renegades' belts bore witness to the havoc that followed them like a cold wind of death.

Geronimo and his followers rode down towards the International Boundary that marked the border between Mexico and the United States.

There the Apache marauder would search for a well-armed fort, and take good care that he and his band were seen by the sentries on duty.

A bugle would sound the call to arms, and the Apaches would ride off, well knowing that before long they would have the entire garrison of mounted men out on their trail.

But that was just what Geronimo intended. He spurred down still nearer to the boundary line, looking for a lonely homestead that would fall quickly and easily to his surprise attack.

There were many small farms and settlements dotted along the southern state boundary, so it was seldom that the Mimbrenos had to search for long.

Then they would set to work. Screeching and riding like mad things they would make their presence known, and while the cavalry galloped frantically to the assistance of their fellow countrymen, the Indians would proceed to carve up the frontiersmen and their families.

By the time the troops arrived on the scene the results of Geronimo's handiwork were at once too visible, while the perpetrators themselves were still in the vicinity, and apparently in no hurry to leave.

They would swing round in apparent alarm to see the soldiers bear down upon them, and often the troopers would spread out in a wide circle, completely cutting off the Indians' retreat.

Then the triumphant cry would go up, 'We've got Geronimo! The varmint won't escape this time!'

The troopers would slowly begin to close in. It could only be a matter of minutes now before the Apache marauders would be forced to surrender, for there was no escaping that tightening circle of armed men.

But Geronimo thought otherwise. He would wait until the

enemy were within striking distance, then, with his warriors close at hand, would make a frantic dash for the approaching horsemen.

The troopers would see him coming and prepare to meet the charge, while those on either side would draw rein and watch the unexpected proceedings, wondering if they should go to the assistance of their companions and risk breaking the ring.

Then the hard-riding Mimbrenos would spring their surprise.

Without warning they could swing their horses, heading for the weakest point in the flank, and making straight for the heavy cavalry mounts.

Both men and animals would be caught off guard, and instinctively give way before the point-blank onslaught.

So Geronimo and his braves were once again free!

Now the Apaches would gallop towards the Mexican border, which lay so near the scene of their recent foray. Once they had crossed the line they were safe from the American troops, who dare not follow, and had to put up with the jeers of their enemies, who stood laughing at the success of the manoeuvre.

On at least one occasion Geronimo varied these tactics.

The usual raid had been accomplished, and once again the United States troops were closing in, encircling the comparatively small band of marauders.

At this particular point the land happened to be less sparsely covered than usual, with tall bushes and large boulders to afford some protection for the hunted warriors.

Geronimo slid off the back of his own mount and led it into a shallow gully, gesturing for the others to do the same.

When the ponies had been tethered securely out of sight the Mimbreno renegade crawled carefully to the summit of a flat rock, and saw that the troopers were still approaching, but more cautiously now that their quarry had been driven to earth.

Geronimo returned to explain the position.

'Soon they will be able to ride no further, and will have to dismount. When that happens we take our chance!' The others knew well enough what he meant. A lookout was posted on the boulder, and sure enough the man soon reported that the troopers had dismounted and were moving forward on foot, carbines at the ready.

So confident were they of catching their quarry that the army horses had been left where they stood, and now grazed peacefully on the outer rim of the circle.

The soldiers still came on, awkward in the high-heeled riding boots, and feeling at a loss on foot among that rough ground.

But they were supremely confident of catching Geronimo now, for they could not see that he could possibly escape them.

They did not stop to think that they were walking into a cleverly set trap.

The Indians waited until they could hear the brushwood breaking beneath clumsy feet and saw the tops of foliage as they parted before the advancing troops.

The soldiers called to one another, holding their weapons high and signalling directions, quite ignoring the fact that in giving their positions away they were playing into the enemy's hands.

It was a simple enough task to slip through the lines of cavalrymen, for while they showed up clearly in their blue uniforms, the Apaches were hardly visible as they slid, tawny-skinned, from cover to cover, almost under the very feet of those who searched for them.

The Americans' horses were reached and mounted, and for a while Geronimo and his friends sat watching the proceedings, knowing that they were safe enough.

When the soldiers came face to face with each other in the centre of the ring they looked foolish, wondering how they could have missed the few men who had so recently been trapped by the encircling movement.

But there was no doubt that though Geronimo had been there recently, he had gone now!

There was a shout as one of the troopers stumbled on the Indian ponies, but at that moment there came a piercing whistle from beyond the rocks. The animals kicked out, biting at the man who had been trying to untether them. Then, breaking the leathers, they were away, scattering other soldiers who ran up to try and hold them.

Out of the gully they cantered, and across to where the Apaches sat. The Indians watched the cavalymen come out, frantically waving their arms as they saw that they were left stranded.

It would have been easy then for Geronimo to sweep back and slaughter the soldiers, but instead he chose to ride away, leaving the enemy to find their way back as best they could to the fort, cursing all Indians and the blisters their own thoughtlessness had raised.

Besides, Geronimo reasoned, there was always the chance that another band of Mimbreno marauders might come across the helpless men and wipe them out.

But that was no affair of his. It had been a good day's sport.

So the Apaches continued to harry the frontiersmen and cavalry who had been sent to protect the pioneers, just as before the Indians had harassed the Mexicans and made their daily existence a misery.

Cochise and his forces were busy, taking deadly toll of the white settlers, but it was to the smaller bands, like that of Geronimo, that the more arduous skirmishes went. The Mimbreno leader knew that it was a constant battle of wits between himself and what were often far greater numbers of troops, armed with superior weapons and having the advantage of reinforcements to call upon if conditions became too dangerous.

So Geronimo pursued his policy of strike and withdraw, strike and withdraw, constantly hitting at the most vulnerable and least-expected points, waging a relentless and tiring guerilla war of his own, and always coming off best in the clashes.

He quickly found out that the enemy had certain advantages that were denied his own people, so made sure that at least his men were equipped likewise.

The first pair of captured field glasses proved themselves more powerful than even the eagle-eyes of his warriors, so from then on the use of glasses played a big part in the Apache campaign. Rifles too, had so far been unknown to the Mimbrenos, whose only experience of fire-arms had been that of the muzzle-loaders used by the Mexicans.

'Listen, my brothers,' the renegade leader would address his followers as they sat their patient ponies, stolen guns cradled in sinewy arms, 'from now on we fight the white man with his own weapons, which have been proved superior to our own. With his arms and our craft we are sure of victory.'

So the raiders chose their victims carefully, attacking cavalry patrols with deadly purpose and taking the powerful glasses of the officers and gleaming new rifles of the troopers for use against their own kind.

Still more reinforcements were sent to Apacheland to stem the clans as they swept from one victory to another, for if Cochise and Mangas Coloradus had little use for such of their tribe as Geronimo they had to admit that his methods were singularly effective when it came to open warfare.

Well over two thousand troops in the uniform of the United States cavalry were now in action, but their strength availed them not at all.

The Apaches literally made rings round the army's clumsy contingents, picking off their men easily, collecting the spoils, and disappearing, it seemed, from the very face of the earth.

Each raid carried out by Geronimo and his followers weakened the enemy, whilst making the Indian position stronger than ever.

Even the authorities in Washington had to appreciate that the situation was worsening daily. It appeared that if things continued in the same vein for much longer that Cochise and

his tribe would indeed realize their intention of keeping the land inviolate from all white settlers.

What a few months ago had looked a most promising future for the pioneers now lay in ruins.

Mines were empty, left to the desert by prospectors who had fled in fear from the Apache avengers. Farms were nothing more than huddled ruins, their owners killed by Geronimo or his kind.

Even the stage coach line had been discontinued, so great was the risk to life and limb by constant Indian attacks. Besides which no new travellers came to the country to book seats on the once-prosperous overlanders.

Finally Apache scouts came in with the biggest news of all. 'The soldiers are leaving!'

And it was true. Detachment after detachment was pulling out, leaving their great forts from which they had ventured so often in vain on the trail of the elusive red warriors.

It seemed as though victory was in the hands of Cochise and his fighting men, but, wise chief that he was, the Apache war-leader did not accept the news blindly, but sent out further scouts to see what might lie behind this sudden decision.

They came back with yet further news.

'It appears that another war has broken out. This time between the white men themselves. It is called a Civil War. That is why the soldiers are going.'

Geronimo paid one of his rare visits to Cochise. He knew that his reputation was still tarnished, but believed for his own sake in making use of every possibility to gain further prestige.

'Now is the hour to strike again,' he said. 'For one reason and another the white men are at their weakest now. Let us make sure that they never recover!'

Cochise had to agree that this was an obvious move. The remaining Americans, be they frontiersmen or blue-coated soldiers, must be pushed out of the country. Only then would the Apaches be ready for peace palavers—and those on their own terms.

So it was agreed. Shortly afterwards the scouts brought in certain information that was to set eager warriors priming their stolen weapons.

The Californian Volunteers had set out to join their union allies, and their way would lead them through Apache Pass.

And that, Geronimo knew, would be the biggest chance of all.

CHAPTER XI

APACHE PASS

IN the time during which Geronimo had been riding as an outlaw his grandfather Maco, the old chief of the southernmost of the nine Apache tribes, had died.

He had been succeeded by Hoo, a vicious and barbaric man, with few of the good Mimbreno traits in his make-up.

It was inevitable that sooner or later Geronimo should join forces with Hoo, for their backgrounds were similar, and the spirit of early rivalry had by then melted into one of mutual admiration, as each heard of the other's deeds in Mexico and around the border territories.

Now, with Hoo and the greatly reinforced band of Apache renegades, Geronimo hid on the slopes of Apache Pass, awaiting the American regiment that, under its commander, General J. H. Carleton, was marching from California to Texas, by way of Southern Arizona.

For many hours Chief Cochise had been making his plans, for he knew that the coming contest must show the white men that the Indians intended to fight to the bitter end for the protection of their homeland.

Cochise and his fellow tribesmen were not concerned with the American Army's own problems.

True, he had heard talk of a civil war, but he reasoned that it could have been a ruse to lull his tribesmen into a false sense of security, under which the advancing regiment would head straight for the Apache stronghold and wipe out the unprepared warriors.

But the Apaches were very far from being unprepared. In fact, though their numbers were about equal with those of the Californian troops, and the Indian weapons on the whole far inferior, Cochise knew that he had one big advantage, and that lay in the position of Apache Pass itself.

To the west, for some forty scorched miles, stretched a desert of dry alkali dust, on the other side of which was Dragoon Springs, the only watering place before reaching the pass.

Cochise and Mangas Coloradus, experienced campaigners that they were, did not take long to see that if the enemy could be prevented from reaching the second resting place their position would be serious indeed.

An exhausted army cannot fight thirst as well as human foes, and the Americans would have no alternative but to turn and head back across the desert when they found the Apaches strongly encamped between themselves and the watering place by the pass.

But once they had taken the only decision left, the tired troopers would be picked off like jack rabbits by the Indians who could ride them down at will, pitting their fresh horses against the straggling, stumbling ones of the cavalry.

Added to which, by all accounts of the Apache runners who constantly kept their headquarters supplied with the latest information of the approaching troops, the cavalry horses pulled behind them several great guns called howitzers. When the attack came those formidable weapons would prove death-traps to the teams who had charge of them.

It was clear that the Indians did not mean to miss any chance of achieving a resounding victory.

Meanwhile, somewhere behind the crooked skyline that marked the beginning of Apache Pass, the Californian Volunteers were coming on.

Perhaps they had already reached Dragoon Springs and were now watering and resting their horses before embarking on the next stage, which would bring them to the foot of the pass.

By then both men and animals would be weary and in dire need of water again. And the water would be there, but before it, like dark gods of vengeance, the Apaches.

It could not be much of a fight, thought Geronimo, for every natural advantage lay with his people. But the Mimbreno

cared little for the rights and wrongs of a situation as he waited impatiently for the first news of the enemy.

Certainly Apache Pass was perfect for ambush. Towering cliffs rose to the summit, upon which many warriors were already hiding. Before them lay great boulders that could be rolled down upon any troopers who managed to run the gauntlet of the Indians lurking on lower slopes.

Mangas Coloradus and Cochise had worked out a careful plan and positioned their men well. Those tribesmen possessing stolen rifles were placed at high vantage points, where they could pick off at long range troopers as they came into sight.

The braves with bow and arrow lay nearer the trail, protected from both the enemy and the bullets of their fellows by long ridges of deeply overhanging rock.

And finally, behind an outcrop of cliff on one flank, the Apache horsemen were gathered. It would be their job to ride out when the marksmen had done their worst, heading off the riders who still remained in their saddles, cutting them down before they had a chance to escape.

All in all the Indians had covered every possible angle of attack, but before dismissing his warriors to their respective places, Chief Coloradus had addressed them in public palaver.

'Our god Usen is with us this day, my brothers. Go into battle knowing you fight for our land, against intruders who have so often tried us with false promises, and killed our people with their treacherous behaviour.

'Even so, you must bear in mind that this will be a great battle.

'The white men are not as we. They do not take heed of signs, neither do they ride expecting attack, as is our manner. Therefore the opening assault should be in our favour. But do not let this make you careless. The soldiers may rally quickly, and if they should be given chance to load and fire their big wheeled guns we shall have lost some of our power. But even so, guns cannot hit warriors that remain unseen. Therefore remain in your hiding places among the rocks, leaving the

open attack to the horsemen. Be content to pick off single men with your weapons. Some of the soldiers are bound to get away.

'Perhaps they may try to re-form and force their way through the pass again, for only there can they get the water they will need so badly. Wait until they return, and attack again. They will not come back for more, and the desert will do the rest.'

The warriors dispersed to their places, priming weapons, waiting, and watching for some sign that the advance guard of the enemy had been sighted.

They were all experienced in war, and Coloradus knew that he could rely upon them to carry out his commands to the letter. Not one bullet or arrow would be loosed until he had gauged the time, allowing the main body of the regiment to enter the pass.

Then the dreaded Apache cry would echo from his throat and suddenly the Americans would find themselves fighting for their lives.

It sounded almost too easy.

Throughout that day the cavalry came on. The horses were slowing now, for the sun was merciless in July, and over forty miles had been covered since watering, mostly in the heat of the day.

The boots of the infantry detachment were white with alkali dust, their webbing was thick with it, and their mouths gritty from the sandy particles that had penetrated their throats and could not be spat out.

Dragoon Springs, the last resting place, was nothing but a memory. Now they set red-rimmed eyes upon the skyline, hoping that it would soon yield the sight of the great funnel-shaped pass, which would hold its own promise of further water and rest.

They did not pause to think that it might also hold a grimmer promise, in the shape of seven hundred massed Apache warriors, situated in an almost impregnable position.

On came the Americans, their numbers straggled for a

good mile or two along the old coaching road. Then they saw the pass, silhouetted blackly ominous against the azure sky. A ragged cheer went up from many parched throats, and even the horses seemed to shake their bowed heads and regain fresh strength.

The howitzers creaked along in the rear, their huge wheels churning the dusty soil into patterned ruts. The stringy-legged mules that pulled them sensed the proximity of fresh water and tensed their muscles afresh against the worn leather harness.

Together Geronimo and Naiche watched from the summit of the hill. Men and animals looked small and black as ants as they crawled ever nearer, but it was not long before further details could be seen, and then it was possible to make a quick calculation as to approximately how many this advance guard constituted.

'I have heard that many of the heavy wagons have been left behind at Dragoon Springs,' whispered Cochise's son. 'If such is the case they can easily be disposed of when we have dealt with these.'

Geronimo's sharp eyes were everywhere, picking out points that he thought might be of use in the forthcoming battle, for though he often abused and ridiculed the Indians' traditional foes, he did not believe in underestimating either their strength or their potential courage.

'I can see one troop of horsemen,' he leant further forward in his rock-bound eyrie, 'and at a guess there must be all of three hundred foot-soldiers.'

The Americans were now close enough to be observed easily without the use of stolen field glasses.

'They draw behind them two of the big guns called howitzers,' said Geronimo's friend. Then turning to his companion, Naiche smiled.

'We have nothing to fear from those blue-coats. Why, they march as to a parade, instead of in enemy country!'

That was true enough, for the leading officer, Captain Roberts, was certainly not calculating the possibilities of an

Indian attack. He had extended no flankers, neither had the advanced guard been preceded by scouts, as was the usual custom.

The cavalymen dismounted at the foot of the road that led up to the pass. Their animals were already near exhaustion point, and the troopers knew that it would be as much as they could do to get their beasts to the water hole before they dropped in their tracks from heat and fatigue.

Now the regiment had actually started the ascent. Slowly, so slowly, they trudged up, yet there were a few sturdy souls who actually started to sing at the thought of the well-earned rest they believed to be so close !

The Americans were well over half way up the trail to the pass when Mangas Coloradus rose from his hiding place and let out an exultant, ringing war-whoop.

Perhaps he made his initial mistake in not realizing that the two big guns were still well behind, and not immediately in the danger zone—but now it was too late to wait any longer.

The tribesmen answered his cry with their own, at the same time opening up the blazing offensive. From all sides it poured down on the helpless soldiers, knocking many of them over like skittles before they had time to see what had happened.

But somehow they rallied. It says much for the endurance and fighting spirit of those Californians that they re-formed their ranks, swung round, and stumbled back from that solid sheet of fire that had taken its toll of men and animals.

Squealing mules kicked and bucked in their traces as they were forced to heave the howitzers round. The reluctant wheels were man-handled by men who dropped with arrows or bullets in their backs as they worked.

The Apache war-cries and the screams of wounded beasts merged into one horrible cascade of sound, which, joined by the curses and shouts of the soldiers, flooded down the mountain side to inundate the valley of the shadow of death below.

Another spate of fire rang out from the cliffs. Below in the

pass soldiers rolled, twisted, crawled, lay still, and stumbled to join their companions who were now in full retreat.

The Apaches had done just what their chief had ordered. None had shown themselves, none had fired too previously—and yet many more of the enemy had got away than Mangas Coloradus had intended.

He held his horse warriors back, feeling that the moment was not yet ripe to send them into action. The Americans would come back again, he felt sure. Next time the Apaches would have to finish the job that still remained surprisingly unfinished.

Somehow the surviving troops managed to reach the deserted stone stagehouse at the foot of the pass. They mustered there, staunching their wounds while preparing for the second encounter.

But now the situation had taken a subtle turn. The Apaches had failed in their first attack to put the American troops out of action, and now, though the regiment's condition was anything but a healthy one, it was preparing to fight back.

The men had suffered casualties in the ambush, but the surprise attack only made them all the more determined to retaliate.

Captain Roberts knew that he had been caught off guard. He was a trained soldier, and well thought of by the men under his command, who now looked to him to evolve some form of counter attack that would make the Apaches suffer as the Californian Volunteers had so recently done.

The officer did not take long to form his plan of campaign.

'Have the two howitzers brought to the front,' he ordered, 'I've got a feeling they'll be a mite more useful to us before the day's out.'

When the return march on Apache Pass began it was with the heavy artillery leading the way, supported by riflemen whose job it was to pick off the opposing marksmen when they gave their positions away.

Geronimo watched the soldiers approach again, feeling more

than a tinge of uneasiness. He noticed that they stopped well out of the range of the Apache snipers, then he glanced back and upward to the peak of the pass where other tribesmen knelt behind the big boulders, ready to pitch them over.

He saw a movement from the heights, and guessed that the Californian officer had seen it also. One of the warriors had given the position away, and it looked as though the enemy were about to make the most of that information.

Slowly the menacing muzzles of the two howitzers were raised.

To Geronimo they looked like the snouts of grotesque black insects searching for their prey.

'Stand by to load!'

The words rang through the still air, punctuated by the crack of an Apache gun, as its owner sought desperately to pick off the soldiers who attended the iron monster.

'Fire!'

Geronimo watched, scowling, still not understanding the true significance of the poised muzzles.

It seemed minutes before a puff of grey smoke belched from the mouth of one gun, and still further minutes before the ear-shattering explosion was caught in the rock walls of the pass and reverberated its vicious man-made thunder round and about the steep canyon.

Then, without further warning, part of the rock face not more than fifty yards from Geronimo appeared to disintegrate. The cliffs that had looked so solid and impregnable now splintered into a shower of stone, whilst the warriors who had sheltered behind them were tossed in all directions, like broken dolls at the blow of some giant hand.

Captain Roberts had aimed at the top of the pass, hoping to land his first shell among the Indians there.

The faulty range, however, was to prove a blessing in disguise for the hard-hit American forces.

The soldiers watched in amazement as the shell did its work, and Apaches from the rocks close by broke from cover and

scuttled back higher up the hill, leaving their shelter shattered and their dead lying where the blast from the explosion had thrown them.

Captain Roberts grinned for the first time in many hours. He wiped a hand over his smoke-blackened forehead.

'Reckon that's taught the varmints a thing or two. A few more of those an' we'll have the red devils beggin' fer mercy!'

The soldiers were busy with the howitzers again, feeding fresh shells into the open breeches.

Now the air was tense with more than gunpowder and death.

So much depended upon the subsequent action, for the battle of Apache Pass had still to be lost or won.

CHAPTER XII

THE END OF THE BATTLE

THE Americans' second attack took its toll of Apache warriors, as the howitzers winkled them out from their mountain retreats.

But the Californian Regiment did not escape unscathed. Geronimo and many others saw what was happening, so commenced a flanking movement, running like lizards from rock to rock, jumping and weaving to avoid the bullets that ricocheted and cracked around them.

With a final yell of triumph Geronimo reached another and safer vantage point, then, priming his gun, he prepared to return the fire of the enemy marksmen.

He grunted with satisfaction as he saw several fall to his accurate aim, and knew that his companions were also harassing the troops, firing into their ranks from either side of the pass.

Captain Roberts saw what was happening, but was helpless to do anything about it. He knew that at all costs his men had got to gain the pass and its spring. If they failed now they would all be as good as dead, either from Indian arrows and bullets or thirst and exhaustion.

So the battle continued, with both sides striving for mastery. The Apaches had lost the initial advantage before rallying to attack from either side, while the soldiers had returned to bring up their heavy guns, at the same time losing men in the process.

Night began to fall, misting the summit of the pass with wraiths of blue-grey cloud.

The cavalry and infantry fought on, trying to increase their joint pressure and effect a break-through before darkness fell, for after that the Apache warriors would come into their own.

Singly and in small groups they could easily sneak down,

picking their way between the boulders and infiltrating behind the American forces.

Every soldier knew and feared the Indian hand-to-hand tactics, and believed that before morning their numbers could have been decimated by the sharp blades of silent assassins.

'It's no good fightin' with ghosts!' rasped one badly wounded trooper who was somehow still on his feet and holding a gun to his blood-stained tunic, 'if we don't get through now we never shall.'

Which summed up the situation grimly and precisely.

So the struggle continued; swish of Apache arrows mingling with roar of American cannon and the light crack of rifle and smooth-bored gun.

But still the deadlock held, with every passing minute now in further favour of Mangas Coloradus and his warriors.

Captain Roberts looked at the purpling sky. He had to make a decision soon, for he was forced to admit that he and his men would never take Apache Pass alone.

Behind the coughing argument of the guns he held a meeting, talking the position over with the surviving non-commissioned officers.

'Someone's got to ride back to Dragoon Springs for reinforcements.'

There was a short, stunned silence. The others had never considered anything like that. It was all but impossible.

'But Captain, the horses are in bad shape. They'll never make it. . . .'

Roberts shrugged. 'They'll have to, that's all. Pick the best ones and give them what water there is left. I'll call for volunteers.'

His tone brooked no argument. Dragoon Springs, and the remainder of the regiment that still rested there was the only hope for the hard-pressed advance guard. There was no shortage of volunteers, though each man knew the odds were heavy against his survival.

The officer picked carefully, but many of the men he would

normally have preferred were now dead or hampered by wounds.

Finally he found himself looking doubtfully at one of the youngest members of the regiment who had stepped forward to offer his services.

John Teal was not yet twenty, but had already shown that he could equally hold his own by the side of seasoned veterans more than twice that age.

But Captain Roberts did not feel confident in picking such a youngster, for it seemed like imposing a death sentence. The troopers chosen for the task would undoubtedly suffer heavy casualties, and the commander was unwilling to let one who was hardly more than a boy run any unnecessary risk.

It was Teal himself who put forward the best argument in his own favour. 'I'm fitter than most of the others, Cap'n. I can shoot good—an' I'm smaller. Should be harder fer the Injuns ter hit!'

That was true enough. Roberts sighed, making his decision.

'Well, I suppose you've a right to go, son. You joined the regiment to fight.'

John Teal grinned. 'No one can't say as I'm disappointed, can they?'

So the selected troopers looked to their guns, then mounted and awaited the signal that would send them galloping back to seek the aid that was essential for survival.

Captain Roberts glanced towards the sky. The hour was about right. Still not too dark, yet with the dusk smearing long shadows and making visibility uncertain.

Even Apache eyes would find it hard to see the soldiers in that uncertain light.

A signal from the sentry to indicate that the coast was clear, and the captain waved his men off. There was nothing the remainder could do now but wait, listening for sounds from the desert that would indicate an Indian attack on the riders, and keeping constant watch in case the tribesmen decided upon an all-out attack from the pass.

'I hope I've done right in sending that lad,' Roberts asked himself more than once. He was soon to realize that but for John Teal, Apache Pass might never have been taken at all.

Mangas Coloradus, Chief of the Mimbrenos, and a party of his most skilled horsemen, sat watching the desert that lay beyond the outer foothills.

They were as still and silent as the rocks that sheltered them, but there was no need for conversation. They believed that the white men would have to ride for help. Their spies had already told them that further reinforcements were camped at Dragoon Springs, but the seventy-year-old chief and his warriors had no intention of help getting through.

They would have waited there all night if necessary, but it was not long before there came a whisper,

'They come!'

Still the Indians sat their quiet ponies. Now their eyes were becoming accustomed to the failing light and it was easier to estimate distances.

Coloradus edged his mount further forward, counting the troopers as they galloped out from shelter, making sure that no further party followed in their wake to give covering fire.

When he was finally satisfied the chief swung his horse, and with a terrible whoop of exultation led his warriors out to begin the chase.

The troops heard, and put spurs to their tired steeds, seeking to extend the lead they already had. One man looked behind him as he lay low over the saddle, feeling the coarse mane of his mount brush his cheek.

He saw the Apaches swarm from the rocks, gliding across the darkening desert like living shadows from the arroyos they had left behind.

Now the two parties settled down to a deadly race, with every dusty yard closing the gap between them.

Back by the howitzers, Captain Roberts had heard the war-

cry of Coloradus. There was nothing he could do now but pray that somehow his men might escape the night hawks as they swooped towards their victims.

Geronimo, riding with the chief who had once outlawed him, promised himself that he would take his personal vengeance of the white soldiers. He eased his gun forward, knees alone guiding the racing pony.

All round him the other Apaches were preparing for battle, hands free to grasp and raise their bows or guns, controlling their ponies in a similar, expert manner.

'The varmints are gaining. They'll be up wi' us soon!'

A frightened trooper gasped, swearing as he fought to get fresh speed from his flagging mount.

Then it was that John Teal acted. Swinging his horse from the path of its fellows he steered well away from the main body of troopers.

'That should give 'em something to think about!'

The young trooper was right. For an instant the Indians wavered in their pursuit, then branched off, hot on his trail, leaving the main party of Americans to continue unhindered.

The Apaches were riding magnificently, enjoying the contest as if it were a buffalo hunt. Coloradus believed that they could bring down the single rider and then return to catch up with the others, finishing them off long before they reached the safety of their own camp at Dragoon Springs.

And that decision, combined with Teal's action, proved to be the turning point of the whole affair.

Geronimo eased his mount out ahead and lifted the gun. In the half-light it looked as though he and the pony were one beast, a legendary centaur.

He aimed carefully, making allowance for the jolt of the animal's pounding hooves.

Teal knew that he would be shot at, but at this stage made no attempt to retaliate. There was plenty of fight left in him yet, as he was so soon to prove.

Geronimo's rifle spat. The trooper's horse bucked, throwing

its rider before rolling to the ground, kicking for an instant, then lying still.

John Teal crawled to his feet, dashing sand from his eyes, shaking his aching head as he searched for his gun.

It could not be long now before the end, but he'd take a few of the varmints on the same trail.

He ignored his body's protests, pulling himself to the shelter of the dead horse, curling behind its back, resting the weapon on its side and taking a bead on the first warrior that rode towards him, shrieking victory.

It was Mangas Coloradus, a giant of a man, despite his years.

The chief loosed a hatchet and swung it, supple-wristed. He would take the first scalp.

Teal pulled the trigger. It was a breech-loading rifle, but of the spate of bullets he released the first one was enough. It caught the Mimbreno chief in the centre of the chest, toppling him backwards off his pony with a roar of pain.

The other Apaches ignored the bullets that fizzed round them like angry bees. They swung from the attack to the assistance of their chief, who lay groaning on the ground, gasping for air through the wound, gape-jawed with the pain.

While the Indians dismounted to tend their leader Teal slipped away. He had had astounding luck and did not intend to try it any further by remaining where he was.

Sore-footed with marching he arrived at Dragoon Springs later that night, to find the other troopers already there.

It was a wonderful story that was told in the shelter of the big stone stagehouse. Undoubtedly Teal had saved the day. Now the Indians would be lost without their leader. Apache Pass would be abandoned. The battle was over.

The Mimbrenos gathered round their wounded chief, all further thought of pursuit gone. Even Geronimo, who cared little for human life, knelt by the side of Mangas Coloradus, his one-time enemy.

A quick examination showed that the old warrior was beyond all aid save that of an experienced doctor, the nearest of whom was beyond the Mexican border.

Geronimo took charge of the situation. 'Make a litter of bows and pelts,' he commanded, then while this was being done he ordered another warrior to ride back to the pass, spreading news of the tragedy.

Though the Mimbrenos were great in war they were as little children when their leader was stricken. Soon they would stream down from their hiding places in the pass, intent only on trying to save the life of Coloradus.

Cochise and his Chiricahuas would have to fend for themselves as best they could.

Though Geronimo had no right to assume the temporary leadership, especially in the presence of the chief's own son, and another sub-chief named Victorio, the renegade's influence was acknowledged by all.

Now they relied upon the outlaw-warrior to save Coloradus's life.

A long and dreadful journey lay ahead for the Apachés. They would have to cross the desert into hostile Mexico, risking attacks by both Americans and *rurales* before seeking out the one who alone could treat the wounded chief.

And they could not go on horseback, for the motion would shake the old man and probably bring on a fatal haemorrhage.

But they were willing to meet whatever hardships and hazards lay ahead. Geronimo had come into his own again, for no one knew the country like he did.

The chief's life depended upon his judgment; thought of failure was inexcusable.

There is nothing like a challenge to put a man on his mettle, and so it was with Geronimo and those Mimbrenos. Slowly they toiled on their way, carrying the injured Mangas Coloradus as though he were a baby.

Over treacherous mountain ranges, across scorching deserts

they trudged, wearing down their own magnificent physiques for the sake of the single wounded body in the litter.

They foraged for food as they went, and slept hardly at all, taking it in turns to carry the improvised stretcher with its precious burden.

Those Indians may have been savages in many ways, but their loyalty to one whom they respected and loved knew no bounds.

Fortunately for them they crossed the border without encountering any American troops, but now an even more dangerous stage of the journey began.

The Mexicans, their traditional enemies, would soon be aware of the Apache litter-bearers, and it was unlikely that they would view the visit with any sympathy.

Far more likely that the suspicious *rurales* would think it was some sort of trick, and imprison the tribesmen in the belief that they were spies, despite the testimony of their wounded chief.

At least it would be a good excuse to capture the party, shooting them down if they gave the slightest sign of violence.

When at last the Mimbrenos came close enough to Janos to see the great gates in its high walls, Geronimo cast anxious eyes round for some sign that their arrival had been noticed.

Sure enough the gates swung back, and a detachment of mounted soldiers rode out towards the waiting Indians.

The semi-conscious chief stirred in his litter, groaning.

In that instant Geronimo knew that the whole fate of the tribe rested on his shoulders.

Only he could speak for his people, convince the Mexicans—and perhaps save a life.

He prepared to fight again, but with words instead of arrows.

CHAPTER XIII

THE KILLING OF COLORADUS

FROM the Mexican point of view the massed tribesmen who stood outside Janos looked a pretty formidable sight.

Though the townsfolk lived comparatively securely within the high adobe walls of their city, they had never lost the innate dread of Apache attacks.

From past experience they knew that the wily Indians could be capable of all sorts of tricks, and now it looked as though another approach by the enemy was about to be made.

The *rurales* were ordered out to investigate the sudden appearance of the warriors, but the apprehensive soldiers did not believe that they would return alive.

On the other hand it was dangerous to let the Apaches come too close, for there was no knowing what fresh devilry they might perpetrate.

So both sides closed in slowly and suspiciously, like strange dogs.

Geronimo stepped forward from the ranked horde, and the leader of the *rurales* puckered his forehead in surprise when he noticed that the renegade carried no weapons.

This time it was clear enough that the Indians meant no harm. Geronimo pleaded almost subserviently with the mounted men, while on the slope behind the entire Mimbreno clan waited.

'Our chief has been badly wounded, we have carried him many miles that he might be cured by your medicine man. We throw ourselves on your mercy in this matter. Take our braves as hostages if you wish—but save the life of our great father.'

There was no denying the sincerity of the words, and they had their effect.

The *rurale* captain conferred briefly with another officer, who then turned to gallop his horse back in the direction of the town.

Geronimo watched closely for any sign of treachery, but there was none. Instead the captain said, 'We believe you, Apache. Bring your chief in, and he shall be looked after as one of our own people.'

So Mangas Coloradus was brought to Janos by his loyal warriors, who had braved many dangers to try and save the life of one who to them was almost as beloved as their own god, Usen.

The narrow streets were crowded with curious onlookers as the litter was borne to the doctor's house. Strange to think that the still figure on those pelts was the great war-chief who had terrified so many similar settlements. But now he lay very close to death, and the love of mankind had temporarily triumphed over hate.

It was indeed a memorable day, especially in those days when violence lived at every man's elbow, and understanding withered in the wide deserts of racial intolerance.

The bells of the churches rang through the torrid air, exhorting the faithful to prayer. The sympathy that was so willingly extended by the town dwellers for their nomadic enemies was based on sound common sense. But even at such a grave moment as this the Mexicans believed that, if things should go wrong, the Apaches might in their grief run berserk and slaughter their benefactors.

So they prayed that their foe might be saved, and with his life, their own.

It was a long while before the doctor had made a thorough examination, for the chief was weak from loss of blood. But finally it was over, and an operation had been performed to remove the American bullet from the old warrior's chest.

Now Coloradus slept more peacefully than ever before.

Geronimo looked down on the drawn face that had faded from bronze to dusty grey.

He knew, as did the doctor, that the father of all Mimbrenos had been granted a further span of life.

Outside the bells ceased, and the citizens of Janos breathed freely again.

The fall of Apache Pass proved to be a turning point in the Indian war. If the Mimbrenos had stayed with their Chiricahua allies it is doubtful if the American troops would ever have reached their goal, but with the enemy virtually halved the Californians found it comparatively easy to return and complete the rout.

When news of the attack reached Washington the public rose in protest.

While such tribes were still at large, the politicians insisted, there could be no lasting peace in the country.

All this, despite the fact that at that time the white Americans were themselves divided against one another!

But in response to general opinion the authorities dismissed United States soldiers to clean up the Indian territory, choosing the Californian Volunteers for the job.

The soldiers responded willingly enough, for now they had an old score to settle. They combed the terrain, intent on exterminating the Apaches by driving them from their old haunts, leaving behind a trail of slaughter and carnage such as the red warriors themselves had never equalled.

No Indians were respected, be they old men, women, or children, and it should be to the eternal shame of those in high places that during the following eight years the United States Army took not one single prisoner.

But if Mangas Coloradus was still weak and unable to participate in the war, Cochise fought on.

Now he and his warriors had to contend with the frontiersmen who returned in the wake of the troops, settling again in Indian country.

He led the Chiricahuas deeper into the mountains, from where they carried on a series of unceasing raids and constant guerilla warfare against the armed intruders.

This became known as the Cochise war, and the chief who

had originally been the most genial and approachable of men now developed into one of the foreign authority's deadliest enemies.

Despite the seriousness of the general situation, there was great rejoicing among the Mimbreno clan when their chief was restored to health.

Geronimo and a war party of picked warriors led Mangas Coloradus to a safe hideout in the mountains, and there the old man listened with sorrow to the stories of the war that waged constantly between the two races.

Perhaps age had mellowed the Apache leader and influenced his opinion, but certainly there was undeniable truth in his words when addressing the council of war-painted tribesmen.

'My sons, I am indeed sad to learn of this great tragedy. My eyes see but poorly now, but my brain tells me that if war continues on the present scale our people will be wiped out. We cannot withstand these white men who fight in such great numbers and with such powerful weapons. Our only chance of survival is to lay down our arms and show that we wish to fight no more.'

The others respected the wisdom of their leader's words, and it was not long before messengers carried Coloradus's appeal to every part of Apacheland.

Once more the chief rode the trail, but now it was on a mission of peace, trying to persuade his people, for their own sakes, to surrender and treat with the white intruders.

Coloradus was held in such high esteem by most clans that there was an instant and favourable reaction from all other Apache chiefs. The only two exceptions were the savage Hoo, who continued on his pillaging, vicious way, and Cochise, grim-lipped as ever as he pursued his own war to the death.

So it was with the vast majority of his people in support that Mangas Coloradus decided at last to contact the American authorities and sue for peace so far as existing conditions allowed.

The Apache was invited to attend unarmed for an interview with the commander of Fort McLean. Geronimo heard the news and immediately went hot-foot to the lodge of the Mimbreno leader.

He wasted no time in coming to the point.

'Do not go on this foolish errand,' he began, his voice rude and loud in its over-eagerness. 'I know the ways of white men. They will trap you. This time you may not escape.'

Mangas Coloradus smiled, and Geronimo could not help noticing how thin and drawn that once-stern face had become.

'Have no fear, warrior,' the chief's voice was as confident as ever, despite his frail appearance. 'I am too old to take the war-path again, but I see other ways of helping my people, and would be no true Mimbreno if I did not do as I think fit. The white men will listen to reason, for they have proved themselves to be far from foolish. And surely the happiness of our tribe is the greatest importance of all?'

Geronimo had no reply to that. Yet when Coloradus and a party of young unarmed braves left camp next day for the first part of their journey to the fort there was at least one warrior who believed disaster to be close at hand.

Subsequent events proved Geronimo to be tragically right.

With two Apache scouts, Acona, and Diablo, the chief approached the camp of the United States soldiers.

They carried a white flag and raised it so that the sentries could see they came peacefully and unarmed.

Two troopers carrying carbines escorted them in.

'Take me to Captain Shirland,' said Coloradus haughtily. 'We wish to talk peace.' The soldiers laughed together, and Acona felt sure he saw them exchange a wink. He tried to push forward and warn his chief to return before it was too late, but he found himself trapped by one of the white men.

'Get back into your place, Apache swine!'

With a face darkened by the insult Acona was forced to obey, but kept constant watch, sensing that they had walked into a trap.

An officer came out of a tent and scowled on seeing the chief's two companions.

'Take those two Injuns into one of the stables an' tie the old 'un up!'

Diablo and Acona were seized unceremoniously and bundled, protesting, towards a ramshackle building. As they went, surrounded by more troopers, they looked back to see Mangas Coloradus being tied. The old warrior did not protest. He stood there, waiting for them to complete the task, uncomplaining, determined to give the soldiers no cause to enjoy his discomfort.

But still there came no hint that the so-called peace talk was to begin.

Instead the captain said, 'Put the chief under guard fer the night. We'll see about him in the morning.'

Mangas Coloradus was led away to a tent, but as he went he saw another officer join the first, and heard part of their conversation.

'What do ye intend doing with the varmint in the morning, captain?'

'I don't rightly know, Colonel West. You see I don't reckon on there bein' any mornin'—fer him!'

They laughed, and Coloradus knew that if he did not find some way of escape during the next few hours it would be too late.

He had come in all sincerity, prepared to forfeit his life, if necessary, for an ideal.

But now he had to force himself to the reality that he might well die without that ideal being accomplished.

Acona and Diablo lay under guard in the stables, unable to help their chief, yet knowing that danger dwelt in the cold night wind outside.

Coloradus was alone in his tent now. His bonds had been loosed and there was nothing to indicate that he was a prisoner save the two guards who sat outside the door, rifles over knees, talking quietly together.

A bugle blew, and the night slept.

The Mimbreno chief realized this was his only chance. There would be no peace talks in the morning, that was quite obvious.

Somehow he had to get past those sentries, find and release his companions. Only then, with perhaps a stolen horse or two, would they stand a chance of regaining safety.

But he would have to be careful; very careful indeed.

The Mimbreno chief lacked nothing in courage or skill, but he was no longer young, and still suffering from the wounds which made him stiff and slow in his movements.

From the back of the tent he watched until the sentries stopped talking. They lay back, heads cradled in arms, and guns by their sides, to doze until the relief came.

This was the chance for which Coloradus had waited. With something like his old agility he moved forward every nerve tensed for the ordeal.

He passed the two soldiers easily enough and went on, trying to guess where the warriors might be imprisoned.

He had not gone far before there was a slight noise somewhere behind.

Coloradus glanced back, and saw one of the troopers jumping to his feet and about to bring up his gun.

'The varmint's gettin' away. Bring him down!'

The second man was up now, and about to fire.

Coloradus broke into a stumbling run, trying to dodge and weave to make his target more difficult. But his legs and body were stiff, resenting the sudden strain put upon them.

The old Mimbreno began to breathe heavily, feeling the deep wound scar in his chest throb painfully.

Two guns roared. One bullet flew past the Indian's head. The other, being lower, caught him squarely in his back.

He fell, twisting to the ground, then lay still.

The soldiers walked over and stirred the limp body with their feet, observing the mark of death.

'He's a gonner, right enough. Reckon your slug caught him.'

The second man nodded in agreement. 'Don't matter much

who it was though. We acted on instructions. Don't ever like shooting a sittin' duck meself. It made sport.'

The next morning Colonel West received the report that Mangas Coloradus had been killed while trying to make his escape.

He smiled with satisfaction, for such had been the intention.

The Apache had played his part well, and all had gone according to the carefully preconceived plan.

'All right,' said the senior officer. 'Release the other two Injuns an' send 'em back to their tribe. Perhaps that'll teach the red coyotes that we mean business.'

Acona and Diablo were brought from the outhouse. They did not need to be told what had happened, and it was easy enough to guess the manner in which the killing of Coloradus had been arranged.

'Now git!' A burly sergeant indicated the horizon, while a party of troopers stood nearby, fingering their guns as though anxious to see if they worked.

The Apaches summed up the situation. It was quite clear that they would have to leave without the chance of protest, reprisal, or even the body of their dead chief.

They turned to walk away, wondering with each passing second if a volley of gunfire would ring out, bullets snuffing out their lives as they had so recently done that of Mangas Coloradus.

But no bullets came. Obviously the white men intended that they should return unharmed with the news that they believed would bring the Apache nation to its knees.

But in this the United States soldiery made its biggest mistake.

Though the Apaches had broken off the battle of the pass for the sake of their wounded chief they prepared to fight all the more savagely now that he was dead.

Geronimo's eyes blazed yellow like those of a wolf. He needed no further excuse to recommence his depredations with all their old ferocity.

Now he was joined by Hoo and the great Cochise himself. By their own perfidy the white men now unleashed upon themselves a reign of terror the like of which had never been seen before in the troubled south-west.

When Geronimo and his kind rode out again it was with unconcealed murder in their hearts.

The moment of the long overdue reckoning was at hand.

CHAPTER XIV

UNEASY PEACE

FURTHER years of almost constant bloodshed stained the history of the West as it was being made.

Between them, Cochise, Hoo and Geronimo waged war against those who had been responsible for the death of the much loved Mimbreno chief.

But if the Apaches previous guerilla tactics had been tough this new upsurge of terror was unrivalled for its ferocity.

Frantically the American frontiersmen fought back, trying vainly to protect themselves and their families from the painted furies that swept down on them unheralded, and disappeared again, leaving yet another train of devastation in their wake.

Many of the settlers got together, deciding to play the Indians at their own game. And with both sides throwing their final scruples to the desert winds the struggle for mastery developed into one of hate, bringing in its turn all that was horrible in the hearts of men.

Two Indian chiefs fell into enemy hands, believing themselves safe with the offer of peace talks that was extended by the Americans.

They were butchered brutally, and the frontiersmen laughed, believing this was the only way to deal with the Apache nation, and the saying quickly spread that 'the only good Injun is a dead 'un!'

Had Geronimo fallen foul of the soldiers just then his life would not have been worth much.

But he was as clever and dangerous as an old wolf, and his warriors took constant toll of the settlers, losing very few Mimbreno lives in the process.

At last word reached Washington of the Army's tricks and treachery against those who had once been honourable tribesmen.

President Grant pursed his lips, studying the official report with very sincere gravity.

'The present situation must be stopped at all costs,' he pronounced. 'Unless the red man comes to respect the white this great country can never know true peace.'

He put immediate and stringent measures into operation, enforcing marshal law throughout Arizona and arresting the leaders among the settlers and American forces whom he believed to have been responsible for undue brutality.

As Grant himself said, 'Such methods as the Apaches now use cannot be countered with like. Man's biggest battle is against his own nature. Once the tribes see that at least we intend to be just, our greatest engagement will have been won.'

An agent was despatched to the troubled territory to make a full report, and in due course returned to place his findings before the president.

Grant listened to what was a far from pretty story.

'Unless the Indians are given special reservations of their own, under governmental protection, the country will always be at war. . . .'

'Why is this?' asked the president.

'Because much of the trouble lies at our own doorstep, sir.

'Not only have the pioneers driven the tribes off the best land, but they have also slaughtered most of the game upon which the Indians depend for a living. There are hundreds of women and children starving now because of the food that has literally been taken from their mouths.'

President Grant paused thoughtfully. Then: 'But what of Geronimo, and those of his kind?'

The agent sighed. 'They present a problem of their own. There is no doubt that they hold the territory in a grip of terror, and this must be broken somehow. In fact the settlers have asked me to say that unless sufficient troops are soon sent to put the Apaches down for good and all, they cannot be responsible for the situation any longer.'

Grant knew things were serious, and lost no time in acting.

General Howard was picked to go to Arizona on the government's behalf, acting as best he thought in view of the gravity of the position which could flare up anew, like a smouldering fire, at any time.

'And remember,' the president's words were calm and studied, but concealed a wealth of anxiety. 'You must make peace with the tribes, but to do this it will probably mean meeting Cochise or Geronimo. Expect nothing from them in the way of honourable treatment, for they are like wounded animals, and may well bite back.'

'Only when you've convinced them that we mean what we say shall we stand a chance of signing a peace treaty.'

Howard saluted and turned towards the door, facing one of the stiffest tasks any officer has ever known.

But President Grant was not finished yet. Now he moved General Crook into Arizona Territory to assist the project. This was a wise choice, for Crook was respected, if only grudgingly, by many Indians who remembered his reputation for scrupulous behaviour and honourable conduct in all things pertaining to current problems.

'You know what I expect of you,' concluded the president. 'Let Howard handle Cochise and his kind. You concentrate on developing the reservations. Show the Apaches that though your skin is white you are on their side, providing they treat you fairly.'

'When I hear that the situation is under control I shall send out agents to give the tribes all the food and clothes they need.'

So it seemed as though at last the Apaches were to get the consideration they had always demanded.

It remained to be seen whether the bad feeling that had been fostered for so long between the two races would defeat the prospect of eventual and lasting peace.

But President Grant was a determined and patient man. He knew that for the sake of every living soul in that vast and still

largely untamed land he and his officers had to restore law and order.

A strange aspect of the situation was the fact that Chief Cochise had, as his closest friend, a white pioneer. This man, whose name was Tom Jeffords, had been taken into the Apache's confidence far more than his own tribe.

Long ago Jeffords had proved himself a loyal and understanding friend of the ageing Chiricahua, and though hatred flared fiercely between their respective races the two friends continued to meet in secrecy. Jeffords alone knew where Cochise could be found—and when. He had no intention of giving that information away, though he could probably have made himself a rich man by so doing.

General Howard heard of this strange association, and one of his first tasks on arriving in Arizona was to contact the frontiersman. Here was obviously a rare chance to shorten the whole grim campaign with a few well-chosen words.

Jeffords listened to his military visitor with a lack of expression worthy of his famous Indian friend.

What Howard was asking meant that Cochise should be persuaded to come in for peace talks, and the settler first had to convince himself of the general's sincerity.

Rather than betray his old friend, Jeffords decided, he would refuse to communicate with Cochise, even if it meant that the war should be lengthened by several more years.

But Howard was persuasive and genuine enough. Tom Jeffords at last rose, speaking with the easy drawl of a man more at home on a horse than in any council chamber.

'I believe what you're sayin', general, an' I'll go tell Cochise.' He raised one horny hand. 'Can't say he'll agree to these peace terms though—that's between the two of ye.'

General Howard nodded. At least it boded good for the future, and he was looking forward to meeting the celebrated Apache war-chief, now reputed to be well over seventy, and still as agile as the best of his warriors.

Some days later Jeffords brought the news that Cochise was

willing to parley. The American officer was led blindfold and unarmed into the mountains which were to be the sole witnesses of the historic meeting.

General Howard's demands were made tactfully enough, and as Cochise listened he realized that here was another white man he could trust.

'You will call your warriors from the war-path, and also, if necessary, prevent your renegades, Geronimo and Hoo, from carrying out further raids upon innocent settlers. . . .'

'In return for which?' Both sides of the treaty had to be thoroughly explored before Cochise would commit himself.

'In return for which the United States Government will undertake to look after the welfare of your people. They shall be fed, clothed, and given back the lands which have been taken from them by the unscrupulous among our own kind. In addition to which——'

Howard had purposely kept a tit-bit until last. 'Your friend, Tom Jeffords, will be installed as agent. He will be the only white man among you, and will live as a brother. Never again shall your families be victimized or go in need.'

Cochise's face gave no indication of his thoughts, but at length he appeared satisfied.

'Those are good words, and I believe you will carry them out.'

'To the best of my ability, I assure you.' Howard extended his hand, and it was grasped by the one who had dedicated his last years to the complete extermination of all white intruders.

Whatever the feelings of the warriors and troops under their respective commands, Cochise and General Howard had reached a gentleman's agreement.

A long beaded pipe was produced, and each man smoked it in turn, praying for the peace that it signified.

When at last Howard returned it was with news that delighted President Grant's heart, but when certain Apaches heard the same tidings the effect was vastly different.

Geronimo and Hoo had by now formed an alliance, working together, far away from the remainder of their tribe, and supported only by their respective warriors, who shared their leader's attitude.

The outcome of the war had long ago ceased to matter. The only thing in the minds of the renegades was the amount of destruction they could wreak on the white settlers, no matter how innocent they might be.

When Hoo heard of Cochise's promise he went livid with rage.

'This so-called great chief of ours is nothing more than a doddering old fool!' he shouted, turning to Geronimo with a face made uglier still with unreasonable anger. 'We must ride against him and cut him down before he brings our people into disgrace.'

But strangely enough Geronimo shook his head.

'That is no way to deal with the matter,' he countered. 'We have the strength of wolves. Let us also use their cunning.'

But though his companion urged the Mimbreno to say what was in his mind Geronimo would only smile and refuse.

Whatever happened he did not intend to leave the war-path for a long time to come.

General Grant was surprised when an orderly announced that a warrior had ridden into camp and was requesting a palaver.

The officer looked up from a letter he had been reading.

'Who is this man?'

A broad grin filled the face of the trooper. 'None other than the varmint we've been after, sir. Geronimo!'

Seconds later the general was striding towards the bronze figure that stood arrogantly in a ring of armed soldiers.

The eyes of both men were steady, but without esteem.

'You have come to surrender?' asked the officer.

Geronimo's eyes burned deeper for an instant before he replied, ignoring the direct question.

'I have come to talk.'

'Well?' Grant determined that his visitor should make clear the position without any help from himself.

Geronimo was completely unabashed. The general decided that he must be either sincere or a very good actor. Certainly this was not the bragging bully he had expected to encounter.

'I have heard,' began the renegade, 'that Cochise has made peace with your government.'

'That is true.' Still Grant waited for the other to come to the point.

'At the beginning of this long and terrible war,' went on Geronimo, 'the tribe which was once ruled by Hoo elected me as their chief, and I in turn offered my allegiance to Cochise, obeying his commands in all things.'

(This was a clever move, making it easy to shed the responsibility for the many raids that Geronimo had really made on his own initiative).

General Grant continued to listen. He could hardly argue the point, for he had no proof. Cochise had agreed to a peace treaty, and this warrior, being one of Cochise's men, must therefore be entitled to the same treatment.

'What is it you want?' The question had to be asked.

'That my people shall be looked after by your government in the same way that you have promised to look after other tribes.'

General Grant looked a trifle impatient. 'That goes without saying. We shall not go back on our word.'

Geronimo seemed well satisfied. 'Then I may give the order for our people to build their villages on this land?'

The general nodded. 'Indeed they may settle here in peace, and without fear of oppression. They will be fed and clothed according to the terms of the treaty.'

Geronimo swung up on the back of his wiry pony. 'We shall not forget your words,' he said, looking keenly down at the officer.

Then, before Grant could speak again, the Apache was gone.

The next day Hoo moved his tribe into the territory, settling them into the reservation that had been provided.

It was significant that once the warriors had set their families up in their wickiups the tribesmen rode off again, leaving only the women, children, and the aged folk to inhabit the reservation.

But there was no one to notice this. General Grant was too busy to supervise every movement, and Tom Jeffords had his hands full in other directions, for now some two thousand Indians of many different tribes depended upon his organization.

Geronimo had picked his location cleverly, for the tribe was installed not far from the International Boundary that separated Mexico from the United States—a position perfect for his intentions.

Next he led the returned warriors far into the Mexican mountains, and there they lived, hiding up and raiding as they wished, just as remorselessly as ever before.

The United States Government for a long while knew nothing of this, believing the Indians to be living peacefully in their new home—which on the surface indeed appeared to be the case.

But Geronimo and his raiders were busy again, happy in the destruction they caused.

Side by side Geronimo and Hoo rode out on their errands of sudden death, laughing together at the trick they had pulled on the ingenious Americans.

Northern Mexico was the first scene of the renewed raids, but after laying waste to everything in sight Geronimo and his band turned their unwelcome attentions upon the remainder of the countryside, extending their activities as far as the Gulf of California.

The terrified Mexican authorities were once more helpless to deal with the Apache menace. In vain they strengthened the army, and tried to track the renegades to their stronghold.

But the Indians would only laugh and ride back across the border where they were safe inside their own reservation.

This then was the sort of peace that resulted from the meeting between General Howard, for such as Geronimo knew loyalty only to their own lawless way of life.

But worse was to come—and from a completely unexpected quarter.

CHAPTER XV

THE TUCSON RING

THE next complication in the Indian question came from the white men themselves.

While Tom Jeffords and his newly-appointed agents were hard at work supplying the tribes with those necessities of life that the government had promised them, another group was at work on a very different project.

These men, who called themselves the Tucson Ring, came from all classes of Western society.

Some were lawyers, some were frontiersmen, and some had no profession other than that of their own wits. But they were all dedicated to a single purpose—that of swindling the United States Government and the Indians, milking the proceeds of the president's scheme into their own personal pails for rich financial gain.

Big stakes were involved, but so well was the ring organized that the leaders stood little chance of arrest. Many politicians were secret members, and through their strength and authority made sure that the only agents to be appointed to Indian territory were those that they approved of and would do what they were told. The other, more sincere men were gradually weeded out on some pretext or other, leaving the whole scheme complete in its corrupt conception.

Now the ring went to work. The Indian agents in their employ continued as usual, ordering stocks of food and clothing for the villages under their care—but ordering only from members of the Tucson Ring!

Bills were made out; money exchanged hands; goods never arrived.

The Apaches shivered and began to starve in their wickiups; betrayed, not by the government, but by traitors in their midst.

General Crook heard what was going on. He stormed across his private office, face knotted in fury.

'I'll fix those varmints, if it's the last thing I do! They're worse than the Injuns themselves! How can we expect Geronimo an' his kind to leave the war-path while our own folk are as two-timin' as rattlers!'

A knock at the door. The general swung round.

'Come in!'

An orderly entered. 'A letter for you, sir.' An exchange of salutes and the man was gone, leaving Crook to flick back the paper curiously.

He read the official wording incredulously.

'We regret to inform you . . . transferred from Arizona to. . .'

It did not matter to where. But General Crook saw clearly enough what had happened.

The Tucson Ring had struck again.

President Grant learned with horror of the Tucson Ring's activities, for they made a mockery of his promises. The Apaches who had originally agreed to the peace terms now lived in poverty, victimized by unscrupulous agents, or had taken the war-path again out of sheer desperation.

Geronimo and his terrorists certainly had an excuse for their behaviour now, even as Crook had realized. The president spent many a long night without sleep, trying to find a way in which to make good the terrible damage that had been done.

Somewhere there must be one who cared more for the good name of his countrymen than for the bribes or threats offered by certain individuals in high places.

And after much searching, such a man was found.

His name was John Clum, a devout member of the Dutch Reformed Church.

Although only twenty-two-years-old, and with no previous experience, he took on the job of Indian agent willingly, perfectly aware that he would be dealing with powerful and unscrupulous forces.

So, in 1874, the president's chosen champion took up his post at the San Carlos Reservation. Immediately he got up against

authority, this time in the person of the commander who had replaced General Crook.

The first interview was not a success. 'Of course, you'll look after the Injuns in the ordinary way,' assumed the officious soldier, 'But in all important matters you'll take your orders from me.'

Oddly enough Clum did not agree.

'I've been placed here in full charge,' he insisted calmly, 'and that's the way it's going to be.' The other saw that it was no use pressing the point. This young man was obviously heading straight for disaster. The officer decided that he was not very interested in this new idea after all, it would never work; there was only one way to deal with Injuns.

'Oh, well,' he shrugged resignedly, 'have it your own way, Clum. I've enough to worry about as it is. But if you get into any scrape, don't come runnin' to me!'

The new agent rose smiling, to extend a hand. 'I won't. Good-bye—and thanks for all the help!'

The army man looked at the closing door in perplexity.

He had a vague feeling he had been gently mocked. Oh, well, the young upstart would learn before long. Especially if he came up against Geronimo. . . .

But before Geronimo and Clum came face to face much more was to happen.

The young Indian agent quickly earned the respect of the Apaches by the straightforward way in which he treated them, even going so far as to learn their language, which few other officials would do.

Clum anticipated trouble from the Tucson Ring, but by winning the tribes' friendship he took the bullies main weapon away.

The Apaches were loyal to those they trusted, so there was no chance of a carefully-placed bribe disposing of the new-comer's life.

It was not long before the Indians began to get their rightful

dues, for Clum would have no nonsense about non-delivery of goods.

Any member of the Ring who tried the old tricks was immediately under suspicion, so rather than be arrested and stand trial the members slipped away into obscurity again, leaving the field of their previous activities to their single victorious opponent.

John Clum went from strength to strength. He lived and worked on the reservation as one of the Indians, encouraging them to the self-government that would bring back their national respect.

He laid down rules, appointed officials, and even recruited a small police force in the cause of law and order.

Never had life been so good in any reservation as that of San Carlos, and for many years to come never was it to be so good again.

But in other directions the situation began to deteriorate.

Cochise, for so long a sick and old man, died. His greatest friend, Tom Jeffords, had no further heart for what had always been a stiff task, and left the territory.

By the middle of 1876 things were very much as they had always been. Geronimo was on the trail again, now fighting with a band increased in numbers by the many braves who had flocked to his call with the death of their own chief.

'Ride with me,' Geronimo continued to chant, 'and we shall sweep all before us. There is not a white man who can stand up to us in courage and determination!'

Except, perhaps—John Clum.

Further work lay ahead for the Indian agent, and the first intimation of this came in a telegraph message which read :

Transfer all Apaches from the Cochise Reservation to San Carlos.

This was a considerable task at any time, and now, when fresh danger threatened, it was a most unenviable one.

But Clum did not for one moment avoid it. His first thoughts were merely concerned with how to complete the operation without causing any fresh strife among the tribesmen and their families, for now the Indians seemed almost divided among themselves.

With Cochise gone much of the old loyalty had gone also. Those warriors who did not take the easy way out, relying on the white men for everything, preferred to follow Geronimo on to the trail, fighting the settlers and soldiers to the death.

On Clum's visit to the Cochise Reservation he took with him the specially trained Apache police. So impressed were the other Indians by the bearing and authority of their fellow tribesmen that all arrangements for the transfer were made without any undue hitch.

Then Clum met Geronimo.

The renegade leader came to see the young Indian agent almost half his own age—for Geronimo was now a battle-scarred veteran warrior of about fifty.

Yet there was no arrogance in the Mimbreno's manner. Indeed, it was one almost of humility. (As it had been on another occasion when Geronimo wanted to further his own plans!)

Clum was impressed. He saw here no more than a tired and perhaps rather bewildered Apache who had been forced into outlawry by the unscrupulous actions of white frontiersmen.

Geronimo's approach was impressive indeed.

'All I ask,' he began humbly, 'is that my tribe be looked after as the great white father in Washington promised. Many of our people are old, many of the squaws bear babies who will not have sufficient food to feed them when they grow up as children. Let my tribe come and live at San Carlos and Usen our god shall bless you.'

Clum saw no reason why he should not comply with the other's request, which was reasonable enough.

'Go and fetch your people,' the agent replied. 'Tell them they have nothing to fear, for they shall be looked after in the

manner you desire. I hope that the Mimbrenos will settle down to prosper at San Carlos. And you will join your tribe, of course?"

Geronimo's beady eyes lowered to the sandy ground.

'I shall join my tribe,' he murmured. 'But first I must ask a single favour.'

'What is that?'

'My people are scattered far and wide among the mountains. It will take several days to send word round so that they may ride in to meet you there. Give me time to make sure that no one is left behind.'

Clum looked at the speaker quickly, trying to catch a glimmer of deceit in those dark eyes.

But there was none. What Geronimo had asked was reasonable enough, and the agent could hardly refuse.

'All right. I'll give you exactly three days. At the end of that time, I shall set out for San Carlos. Be sure your tribe is here by then.'

'I shall be sure.' Geronimo turned away without a word of thanks, and as Clum watched the lithe figure stride towards a waiting pony he wondered if perhaps he had not made a mistake.

But what sort of mistake could he have made?

It was too late now to go back on his word, even if he would have considered it for one moment. No, Clum insisted to himself, a trifle too vehemently, there was nothing to worry about. The whole thing had gone off very well, and the much-feared Geronimo had proved amenable. Why, he had even met the agent to make a case for his tribe.

John Clum returned to other duties, still refusing to admit the tiny niggling doubt that lay at the back of his mind.

What was Geronimo up to—if anything?

As Geronimo headed his pony back towards the mountains he was well pleased with himself. Nothing had been simpler than to fool the new Indian agent, and the Mimbreno renegade

argued to himself that a trick which had already proved its worth could well repeat its success. At least he intended to try.

As he passed isolated wickiup villages he gave orders for the inhabitants to pack up and move into the Cochise Reservation, where they would be taken care of and assured of a comfortable and happy future, free from worries about food and clothing.

'The white man has taken our land,' he would grin savagely, 'let him look after you now—but be sure you want for nothing, or it will go hard with those who have promised so much!'

The tribesfolk did not ask what their chief was going to do, for they had a very good idea.

As he went Geronimo recruited the fiercest and best fighters.

Those who were at first unwilling to fall in with his plans were soon won over by extravagant promises of loot and excitement to come, and also by the rapidly swelling band of warriors who rode in the old wolf's wake.

So when the Mimbrenos set out to join Clum and the Apachés he intended taking back to San Carlos, it was significant that only the old men and boys too young for the war-path went along with the women and children.

The remainder of the tribesmen, led by Geronimo, had other and more deadly intentions. . . .

One day passed. The first few straggling villagers arrived at the Cochise Reservation, settling down unconcernedly amid their new surroundings and awaiting instructions from Clum.

On the second day still more Apachés came in. The agent glanced round with satisfaction. Geronimo had done a good job. There was nothing war-like about these people, and clearly they looked to him to provide for their future needs. He promised himself that they should not be disappointed.

Now only one more day remained before he would lead the assembled Indians back to San Carlos. But it was strange that Geronimo had not appeared.

Perhaps he had ridden far into the mountains, rounding up his Mimbrenos. There were many hours left before the return journey was due to begin.

But on the third day Geronimo still had not shown up, and Clum began to suspect the worst.

He called Clay Beauford, an ex-cavalryman who had been recruited to train and lead the contingent of Apache police.

'You'd better pick up Geronimo's trail, sergeant. When you find him tell him we're on our way. You can catch us up later on.'

The friendly Apaches had no difficulty in leading their American commander out in the direction Geronimo had ridden, and they found his camp easily enough.

Or rather, the camp where Geronimo had last been. Now it was empty and deserted; the ashes of a fire cold and wind-blown, the hoof-marks on the sandy soil almost eradicated by the weather.

Beauford looked up to the senior tracker. 'Which way did he go?'

The man pointed away to the distant mountain range that stood like a jagged edge on the horizon.

'The Sierra Madre? We'll never catch 'em there!'

And at that moment Beauford realized that Geronimo never intended to be caught—anywhere. His people were safe again, but his warriors were riding by their renegade leader's side, ready to pounce when he gave the command.

The officer swung back into the saddle. 'No use stoppin' here!' He turned to canter his horse back in the direction that John Clum and the mustered Indians were travelling.

He would overtake them well before San Carlos, but his news would not be very acceptable.

Clum had slipped up badly. He had had Geronimo in his hands and let him go again.

For that one, excusable mistake, many people would suffer.

CHAPTER XVI

GERONIMO SNARED

FROM his stronghold deep in the mountain Geronimo continued to direct his personal war.

This was his country, it had been his father's, too, and his father's father before him.

'While I live,' the renegade never tired of saying, 'I shall not let these invaders of our land sleep in peace.'

And suiting action to the words, he rode out again and again on raiding forays that brought grim harvests to the Apache knives and left the frontiersmen and their families fearful about the future.

But where Geronimo had once been concerned with mere wanton destruction for the sake of revenge, now his tactics began to change.

'Listen my brothers,' he glanced round the assembled warriors, noting the paint slashed across their lean faces, and the blades sharpened afresh for further action. 'For many moons we have taken enemy lives. Let us now make ourselves rich by taking their gold as well!'

'But how can we do this thing?' asked one listener. 'We cannot risk capture by stealing it in great quantities. And it would be impossible to do business with the white men now, even if we wished it.'

But surprisingly enough Geronimo shook his head.

'I think not. There is a certain way in which we can do business, and make fools of those meddling strangers as well!'

The warriors crowded closer to hear what their chief had to say.

'For some while, you will remember, we have been driving off horses from the Arizona settlements we have raided?'

Another tribesman spoke up, 'That is true enough. To my knowledge there are at least two thousand head hidden not far from here. Many more than we need.'

'But,' went on Geronimo, chuckling, 'those settlers need them badly enough—if only to carry on their fight against Apache raiders!'

After the general amusement had died down Geronimo finished his explanation. 'Of course we shall not attempt to sell those animals back in the area they were stolen from.'

'Where, then?'

'My spies tell me that white pioneers are gathering in the Rio Grande Valley. They will have need of livestock. So we shall drive the beasts there.'

So Geronimo and his bandits returned to the United States once again—not as raiders, but as horse and cattle salesmen!

It was a big and audacious task that faced them, but much to the liking of the warriors, whose imagination the scheme had caught.

They arrived in New Mexico without being spotted by the cavalry patrols who were out searching for a small band of renegades. That feat alone proved the Apaches' superiority when it came to a knowledge of the country.

But now Arizona and the American cavalry were far behind, and when Geronimo and his companions contacted the first white township they were in the guise of innocent and friendly Indian merchants.

As the chief had anticipated, there was no difficulty in selling the stolen horses and cattle. It was with money-weighted purses and saddle-bags that the bandits eventually turned towards Ojo Caliente, on the first leg of their return journey.

It so happened, by one of those odd coincidences that have been responsible for many more important things, that a solitary rider was destined to cross the path of the Mimbreno bandits.

The lone trooper was returning to his unit after a well-earned leave back home. The last thing he wanted or intended to do was to tangle with Indian marauders—let alone those commanded by Geronimo.

But he recognized the Apache immediately from first-hand descriptions of those fellow troopers who had fought and trailed him.

The soldier did not hesitate. He tightened the reins with a jerk that made his horse rear and swing round. The animal felt the prick of urgent spurs and headed for the horizon.

The Apaches spotted the distant flying figure, and guessed that they had been seen.

It did not need Geronimo's command to send their ponies into a canter, but though they rode faster than the desert wind they could not overtake the trooper before he reached the foothills.

With an angry swarm of bullets buzzing round him, taking flying chips off the rock face, the blue-coat dived for cover.

His horse was lathered and lame from the sharp stones over which it had been forced. But now at least they stood a chance of escaping from the renegades who so desperately sought their hiding place.

The trooper stood in the heavy shadows of a small arroyo, holding one hand over the muzzle of his winded steed.

He knew well enough the alternatives before him. If Geronimo's hunters passed by all would be well, and he stood a good chance of slipping away and reaching headquarters to spread the news. But if they got a sight of him at such close range he would not have long to live.

A shower of pebbles rained down from the cliff-face above, and the soldier struggled to control his frightened horse. But the hooves that stirred the brief downpour passed on, clattering into the distance, leaving the gulley to the lizards and basking rattlers.

After making certain that he was quite alone again, the trooper led his mount carefully out of the vicinity before galloping it for all he was worth back to the post with the exciting news that Geronimo was in the district.

That was the beginning of the sequence of events which was to trap the renegade for the first time in his lawless life.

Now another factor affected the force of fate that was steadily piling up against Geronimo.

It was on 20 March 1877, that John Clum, Indian agent at San Carlos, received the following telegraph message from the Commissioner of Indian Affairs in Washington :

Geronimo and renegades at Ojo Caliente. Send police to arrest them there, after which hold prisoner at San Carlos pending trial.

All of which was rather easier said than done !

Clum read the message several times, seeing in its meaning more than one difficulty.

To begin with, it seemed a dangerous policy to send in the Apache police without first consulting the tribal council, and this he hastened to do at the first opportunity.

Chief Skimmy heard Clum in silence, then pronounced his verdict.

'My people wish for peace. Geronimo and his warriors wish only for war. Therefore we must ride against them. We will do this, but only if white soldiers do not interfere.'

Clum had to agree to this. He knew that despite the handicap of not being supported by the United States cavalry it would be better to let the Apache police handle the situation in their own way.

Geronimo was unpredictable, and those who knew him best were to be found among his own kind.

The agent picked up a pair of heavy iron manacles. 'These might be useful—leastways, I don't intend carryin' 'em all the way back !'

So Clum set out, at the head of a contingent of Apache police. The journey that faced them to Ojo Caliente, or 'Warm Springs,' was no easy one, and owing to the lack of horses at the reservation had to be undertaken on foot.

Clay Beauford and Clum made their plans, and when the Apaches lay some fifty miles from their destination, scouts went ahead to spy out the land.

The remainder of the police were glad of the respite, for it had been an exhausting but necessary forced march.

Every hour brought the probability of action nearer, and though Clum had armed his men with the latest weapons he wanted them to be a physical match for the cornered renegades, who would be sure to put up a fight.

John Clum listened with mixed feelings to the report of the leading scout. 'Geronimo and his warriors are still at Ojo Caliente, but there are over a hundred of them. They are well armed and seem to be expecting an attack.'

Clum began to wonder if news of his march had filtered through to the renegades, but came to the conclusion that it must be mere coincidence. He knew nothing of Geronimo's pursuit of the cavalryman, and of the alarm it had caused among the Mimbreños.

Now the Apache police had to move very carefully and with some cunning. Either they would trigger off a large-scale outbreak by the bandits, during which they would head back towards Mexico, or they would concentrate on coldly wiping out their own countrymen.

Clum talked the tricky point over long and carefully with Beauford.

'Seems to me we've got to catch the varmint with bait.'

'What sort of bait do you suggest?' The police chief looked curiously at the agent.

'Me!' Clum laughed at the other's comical expression of utter surprise before going on to expand this theory.

'I'll take Chief Skimmy and several policemen. We'll reach Warm Springs early in the morning, when they can see our strength. Meanwhile you follow up with the rest of the contingent. Then while I'm busy. . . .' Clum dropped his voice, and the conclusion of the planned campaign took place in whispers.

The two Americans never forgot that they were surrounded by Apaches. Though they believed implicitly in the loyalty of the police, they could not risk the leakage of vital information.

And so, with each man in charge of a party the attackers prepared for action, though only Clum and Beauford knew the effect that of their individual tactics would produce.

John Clum, accompanied by the chief and some twenty Apache police went on to Warm Springs, reaching it well after sun-up, and seemingly oblivious of the hostile horde that waited there, watching their every move.

The Indian agent made straight for the agency building, under the eyes of Geronimo's warriors who had been posted at strategic points throughout the reservation.

Only when actually installed in the building did Clum make any attempt to contact the renegade leader, and then it was by way of a messenger who sought Geronimo to attend for a palaver.

The bandit chief heard this news with some amusement.

'Who is the white man to come marching in with his few attendants who call themselves good Apaches?' he sneered. 'They can never hope to take us, otherwise they would not have shown their miserable strength in so foolish a manner.'

The messenger waited nervously. Then he heard Geronimo's decision. 'Tell your white master I shall come. But tell him also not to keep me waiting, for I have many matters to attend to this day!'

Roaring with laughter at his own words Geronimo watched Clum's representative go, then the outlaw began to get busy.

He called together his leading warriors and sub-chiefs, telling them: 'There is no cause for fear here, brothers. Never in a thousand years can this white man be of any danger to us. Therefore we shall have a little joke at his expense, and when the joke is over he and those traitors who dare to call themselves Apaches shall die!'

So now Clum's snare had been set, the bait was ready, and there was nothing to do but wait and see if it could claim its victim.

The hot morning sun beat down with its usual intensity on

the Ojo Caliente Reservation, which had a deceptive air of sleepiness.

A horse nodded by a hitching post, swishing away flies with a lazy tail, head drooped into the welcome shade.

A single Indian sauntered across the sidewalk, unaware of the death that lurked behind certain closed doors.

On the veranda of the agency office Clum and a few of his police waited.

Finally the word came, passed quietly from mouth to mouth. 'Geronimo comes.'

Unobtrusively a crowd began to gather. The inhabitants of the reservation shuffled in from side streets, lining the square parade ground which was flanked on one side by the agency offices, and on the opposite side by a big storehouse.

All eyes were now on the Indian agent and his men. Geronimo had withdrawn the sentries who watched the outer desert so that they might share the enjoyment of Clum's downfall and be ready to pounce on their fellow tribesmen when the order was given.

A dog stretched in the heat, then slept afresh. Across the wide square four figures were seen approaching Geronimo and his three sub-chiefs.

Watched by the whole community, both friend and foe, they sauntered casually up to the agency building. The only sign of their attitude was in the guns they carried carelessly yet with significant readiness.

As the renegades came up Clum glanced at those guns. He knew they would be loaded. It would be a near thing, he thought. If the weapons could be raised and fired before. . . .

But Geronimo had halted and was speaking.

'What would you have with me, white man?'

Clum did not raise his voice, yet it carried to the farthest point of the assembly.

'This is the second time we meet Geronimo. I trust that now your word will be of more value than before!'

Geronimo took the calculated accusation as a joke, remem-

bering the tribespeople he had foisted on to Clum before breaking his given word to return.

Then the old arrogance. 'Speak now, for I have no time to palaver.'

Clum's eyes caught and held those of the renegade. The agent noticed that now Geronimo's face was leaner than before, and there was a fleck of grey in the blue-black hair. The years of devastation and constant battle were beginning to leave their mark.

'I am here,' Clum's voice was firm, and well under control. 'To escort you and your warriors back to San Carlos, where you will live with your tribe and never again take the war-path.'

The listening renegades burst into a chorus of mocking laughter, and when he spoke again Geronimo made no attempt to conceal his own derisive mirth.

'I am not interested in the orders of any so-called Indian agent or the white man's government which never leaves the safety of a city. Take me if you will—but take me in battle!'

The renegade warriors raised their guns menacingly, but Clum ignored the threat.

'All right,' he said with apparent reluctance, 'if that's the way you want it.' Then suddenly, for the first time he raised his voice.

'Get him!'

At that moment a noise from the rear attracted the crowd's attention. Before Geronimo could fire, a group of armed men ran from the warehouse. They had encircled the surprised bandits even before the wide door had swung back on its creaking hinges.

Clay Beauford and the remainder of the Apache police had come up while Clum had mustered the reservation. The men had found an ideal hiding place in the building, and now it was clear they meant business.

John Clum laughed as he saw the dismayed outlaws lower

their guns, seeking some way of escape through the ring of armed Apaches who moved remorselessly forward.

The onlookers held their breath, shuffling back to the safety and shelter of the nearest outbuildings.

So the two parties faced each other. Geronimo and his renegades were cornered like wild animals in an open snare.

But like wild animals they could well prove dangerous.

What would be the outcome of the next few fateful minutes?

THE SHOWDOWN

ALL eyes were on Geronimo. If he fought now his companions would be forced to fight and die with him—for there could be no reprieve from the verdict of a score of levelled rifles, held by his own countrymen.

He looked from face to face, hoping to see some spark of sympathy in the eyes of at least one Apache policeman.

But there was none. Indeed, there was not even so much as a glint of recognition. And that must have hurt Geronimo's conceit most of all.

'Well,' came John Clum's taunting voice, 'when does the party begin?'

For answer Geronimo tossed his own gun to the ground. His warriors waited for a second or two, then followed suit.

'Thought you'd see reason!'

Clum left the veranda and walked towards the renegade chief. The ring of encircling Apaches parted to let the agent inside.

Once more the two enemies stood face to face.

'I accept your surrender,' Clum said, then instinctively stooped to pick up Geronimo's gun.

In that split second the Mimbreno attacked. Seizing a hunting knife from his waist, Geronimo threw himself upon the helpless agent.

'Look out, John!' A shout from Beauford alerted Clum, who jumped sideways just in time to avoid the razor-edged blade on its downward sweep.

Geronimo did not have a second chance. He was quickly overpowered by Apache police, who wrested the knife from his grasp and clamped heavy manacles on his wrists and ankles.

The sub-chiefs surrendered tamely enough, having no spirit for further resistance now that their leader was powerless.

'Right. Get 'em back to San Carlos!' Clum's voice was taut with nerves. From the start it had been a tricky and dangerous job, this rounding up of Geronimo and his gang, and the agent had had to tackle it virtually single-handed.

Now it was over, and he had only just escaped with his life, Clum found his patience with the renegades completely exhausted. He had proved beyond all possible doubt that such as Geronimo only took advantage of kindness, believing it to be a form of weakness. The marauders respected only such treatment as they themselves would have handed out.

So it was with natural satisfaction that the agent looked forward to seeing his captives put away for good. But things did not work so simply.

After the Mimbrenos had been returned to San Carlos as prisoners to await the next stage of the proceedings Clum contacted the authorities to inform them that the mission had been completed successfully.

He was told to hold Geronimo and his warriors indefinitely, pending trial, but during that time the government seemed to lose all further interest in the matter, and other events began to develop.

The Tucson Ring gained fresh strength—so much so that these unscrupulous profiteers finally forced Clum to resign as Indian agent, thus succeeding with their subversive methods where Geronimo and his kind had failed with their more forceful ones.

Clay Beauford also left, and with his going the power of the Apache police force began to dwindle.

Another agent was appointed, but the man had little interest in his job. Rather than be bothered by the responsibility of guarding prisoners closely, he let Geronimo and his band out on parole, while awaiting the trial that was doomed never to evolve. Geronimo made a model prisoner—but then, he had his reasons for being one!

The San Carlos Reservation, lying along one bank of the Gila River, was actually a poor sort of place.

It had been given to the Indians' use because it was of no value to any American settlers. The land was dry and barren, for during the winter months a bitter wind scoured the area, whining round the few stunted trees that dared to grow there. In the summer the wind disappeared, making of the district a scorching dust-bowl that even the desert reptiles shunned.

Small wonder that Clum had been the only white man to have settled there for any length of time. But then John Clum was a dedicated worker, and had the interests of the Apachés at heart.

When he left the Indians were free to do much as they liked, but with the Tucson Gang once more up to its old tricks found life harder than it had been for a very long while.

But the prevailing conditions suited Geronimo. He was now comparatively free, unguarded and seemingly ignored. Day after day he prowled the reservation, contacting the warriors who had ridden with him before and making plans for the future.

He was unarmed now, but Geronimo did not allow that fact to deter him. Once or twice he found rounds of ammunition, fallen from some careless belt; he hid these carefully, marking time until he saw the opportunity of stealing a gun.

When this chance presented itself he was not slow to take it.

Things were going well, and soon he would be ready to ride again!

Before that could happen, horses were needed. But, his restless eyes told him, there were horses at the agency.

A raid was planned, for besides horses the agency at San Carlos had a small armoury of weapons and ammunition. Word passed from mouth to mouth, and soon Geronimo's warriors had assembled again, waiting for the dark of the moon and the moment to make a surprise attack on their latest target.

The new agent was out of the territory, and the building was guarded only by Apache police. Though they hated Geronimo and his kind, and under other conditions would have feared

the renegades, they believed that the prisoners were safe enough and would offer no further threat.

When the attack developed the guards were taken completely by surprise.

The first renegade climbed over the veranda, hardly more than a shadow in the surrounding darkness. Silently he crossed to the door of the armoury, drew a sentry's knife and slipped it expertly into the small of the man's back. The Apache policeman slid to the floor without uttering a sound.

Now the warriors were busy. Under Geronimo's supervision they carried out the best of the guns and as much ammunition as possible.

Other guards had meanwhile been put out of action, and not far away the horses were being led from their stables.

Then, when everything was complete, the renegades mounted.

Waving the stolen rifles they careered through the night, screeching like demons raised from regions below.

By the time the remaining police were on the scene Geronimo and his men were far away, on a fresh war-path that was to lead to new and bigger thresholds of terror.

And far away in Washington the trial of Geronimo had yet to be organized!

From the security of a new hideout the renegade Mimbreno surrounded by his old loyal henchmen and several newcomers, made fresh plans.

'The white men shall have cause to remember us,' he promised. 'First of all we shall attack where we are least expected.'

'And where shall that be?' asked Hoo, now a permanent drunkard who had relinquished all claim to the chieftainship and was content to do as he was bidden provided he got all the firewater necessary to keep him in a state of perpetual fuddlement.

'No other place but the San Carlos Reservation!' chuckled Geronimo. 'We can take more horses and ammunition, besides paying off one or two old scores as well.'

But in this instance Geronimo's greed nearly proved his downfall.

He had not taken into account that his previous actions had done him much harm in the eyes of many of the Apache tribe, and there were those who sought, as much as any white man, to bring about his capture or death.

When the renegades returned to San Carlos they discovered that the reservation was well picketed.

There was no chance of getting near the horse lines or armoury, and the outlaws were hard put to fight their way back to the safety of the desert.

They did so at last, leaving behind the bodies of half a dozen Apache police and the tribal chief who had dared to stand in their way.

Now Geronimo the wolf had become vicious and desperate, attacking his own kind, and in turn being hunted by both red man and white.

But try as they would the authorities could not catch the elusive renegade, who, with his hard-riding warriors continued to hold the areas of North Mexico and South Arizona in a state of almost continual fright for several years to come.

Indeed, in 1882 the situation had again got so out of hand that the inhabitants of Arizona marched in open rebellion against the government they felt to be useless when it came to dealing with the Geronimo terror.

By then the Mexican Army had been fully engaged but had failed to trap the raiders as they swooped in triumph across the border.

Over three thousand American troops had also been involved in the large-scale manhunt, but returned, footsore or with lame horses as their only reward.

President Arthur, who was now in power, viewed the situation with unconcealed gravity.

The facts placed before him did not make pretty reading, yet clearly the whole state, even the entire new continent, was looking to Washington for a lead.

Once again General Crook was summoned. The officer had proved a wise counsellor and was well respected by the Indians who had experienced in his previous ministrations a degree of sincerity that was all too lacking in other spheres of authority.

But while Crook was on his way back to the trouble spot of Arizona even bigger projects were being debated by Congress.

'Gentlemen,' said the president in one of his addresses, 'it is in my mind that something can now be considered which I believe to be long overdue. That is, a treaty with Mexico.

'While these Indians continue to use the border so cleverly they will never be caught for the International Boundary proves more hindrance than help to our forces. Let us suggest, therefore, that for the time being at least, troops of both nations shall be free to cross it at will.

'That should make matters considerably more difficult for Geronimo and his kind.'

The Mexican authorities were more than willing to co-operate, and for the first time in years the two countries found themselves pulling together in a common cause.

In one way, at least, Geronimo had done some good!

But the citizens of Arizona, its settlements and townships, were still badly frightened. They had now lost all desire to distinguish between good and bad Apachés.

'Kill 'em all!' became the general cry. 'The only good Apache is a dead 'un!' The old belief, but now given a new slant, thanks to Geronimo and his renegade warriors.

President Arthur worked hard, realizing the gravity of a situation that was fraught with all manner of dreadful possibilities.

The United States had seen enough war, of one kind or another, during recent years, and now it appeared probable that through the depredations of one man, fresh violence could sweep the land.

But slowly the work of restoring order began to show results.

The Tucson Ring was broken for all time, its members caught, tried, convicted and sentenced. Now, with the majority

of bad whites cleared from the scene, General Crook had a free hand to deal with the Indian problem.

But the sight that greeted him was a sad one indeed.

The Apache reservations were all but deserted, with only a matter of hundreds still left to semi-starvation and neglect.

Every man who could still ride a horse or draw a bow had left for the war-path. Many had formed marauding bands, in which they fought together after the manner of Geronimo and his outlaws.

All of the missing men were desperate, and after the manner of wild animals who had been cruelly treated, sought only to get their own back on life.

But Crook knew his tribesmen and how to deal with them, no matter how serious the situation. Spurning all armed assistance the General set out on a lone ride through the brooding countryside.

He knew that his progress was being watched and reported on, but he also believed he would be quickly recognized. His whole scheme depended upon that.

It was not long before he saw a warrior, posted as a lookout on the edge of a wide canyon. Only another Indian would have spotted the figure, but Crook's eyes were sharp, and he knew where and what to look for.

He drew rein and sat in his saddle, giving every indication of having seen the sentry, and requiring a palaver.

The approach worked, and soon another figure slid from the shadows at the mouth of the gulch and came straight towards the rider.

Crook noticed with satisfaction that the Indian was unarmed, so raised his own hand, palm outward in the traditional sign of friendship.

It was clear that the Apaché warriors recognized the newcomer even before they were within talking distance. The long overdue return to the ways of peace was about to begin.

'We have not seen you for many moons,' the warrior said. 'What do you want here with us now?'

Crook smiled. Though he was far from conceited he knew the respect in which he was held by even the most war-like of tribesmen.

'I have come,' he said, 'because bad stories have been reaching my ears. It is said that the entire Apache nation is on the war-path.'

The other did not deny this. 'For our own sake——' he began.

'For your own sake,' the General interceded, 'I am here to see that you return to your rightful territories. If your chiefs go on as they are doing there can only be one end—and that will be in the complete annihilation of your nation!'

The warrior did not reply, for there was cold logic in the American officer's words.

'What would you have us do, then?'

'Trust in me, as your people have done before. Let the chiefs come to me and give up their arms. Those who do this will be forgiven, but those, like Geronimo, who fight on can expect no mercy!'

So the word passed over the mountains and deserts of Arizona.

'Crook has come—shall we obey his command?'

Far across Indian country the message spread, echoed by faint puffs of distant smoke that hazed the blue sky; by the cry of a solitary night bird; by a twig or small pile of stones at the side of some little-used trail.

And the Americans waited to see what the result would be.

Slowly at first, then in a steadily swelling stream, the Apache warriors returned. They entered the reservations sulkily, handing over their arms and squatting before their camp fires as though not wishing to be reminded of a recent and still painful experience.

But Crook's courage had paid off. With the tribe under control again and the situation easier, the General began to make further plans.

'I'm not goin' back to Washington before Geronimo's in the bag!' He slapped his knee to emphasize the decision.

But he knew the size of the task before him, not to mention the dangers. It was now developing into a duel between the wills of two men.

Only one could come out on top—would it be Geronimo, or would it be Crook?

CHAPTER XVIII

DUEL IN THE MOUNTAINS

WHILE Geronimo continued to jeer at the frontiersmen and their clumsy methods, General Crook set about the immense task that lay before him.

He was courageous enough to tackle the renegades single-handed if need be, but was sensible enough to know that only failure could result in such a case. He had seen too many American scouts brought back limp over the saddles of their horses.

So Crook chose a group of men who would assist his campaign, and at last he was ready to begin.

'Now see here, gentlemen. I don't need to tell you what sort of affair this is goin' to be. You've been picked because you're all experienced soldiers. You know the country an' the Injuns; you speak their lingo, know the way they think, and can hold your own when it comes to a spot of fightin'. But we shall need even more than that to catch Geronimo. We can't expect to penetrate far into renegade territory without the help of the Apaches themselves, and luckily I've been able to arrange that. There are plenty of tribesmen who hate Geronimo's guts just as much as we do, an' they'll be pleased enough to ride on our side.'

The listening officers knew that Crook was referring to the Apache police who had been enlisted by John Clum and led by Clay Beauford. Though disbanded, these men had been easy to trace, and had responded whole-heartedly to the appeals of the authorities to return and take up their former ranks. There were others, too, who had flocked eagerly to ride the trail with General Crook. Some of these Indians were themselves former marauders who had long since taken off their war-paint and become law-abiding citizens of the American Government.

'So,' concluded Crook, 'I've got me a company to meet anything that Geronimo and his pack are likely to offer. From this day you'll be known as the Apache Volunteers. Captain Crawford, you'll be in command, and have Davis here and Gatewood as your lieutenants. But don't forget I'll be along too, fer the ride!'

'What about scouts?' asked Crawford quickly. 'We can't expect to get far without them.'

The general agreed. 'True. I think you'll have all the experienced guides and trackers you need among the Apaches, especially those who hit the war-trail a while back. But I've put Al Sieber in charge of that department.' Crook gestured towards a veritable boulder of a man, with features craggy as any cliff face.

'Don't ye worry none about me, fellers,' Sieber grinned. 'I'll take ye where ye want—an' a few other spots as well!'

Next General Crook turned to a large map that hung on the wall behind.

'This is where we're makin' for.' A finger stabbed the chart at a place near the International Boundary line.

'The Sierra Madre Mountains are a tidy pile of molehills. They run over two hundred miles down into Mexico, and must be well over a hundred miles wide. I don't need to remind you they'll take some investigatin'. Yet we've got to comb those Sierras as fine as a baby's hair, for Geronimo and his gang are holed up there somewhere.'

'Goin' ter be quite thrillin'!' drawled Lieutenant Gatewood, 'seein' as how there are quite a few places as haven't been penetrated by white men yet!'

General Crook quickly became more serious. 'I know how you feel, but there's no alternative. It's either us or them now, an' I don't fancy losin' to no painted Apache murderer. I suppose we could do with more troops. We've only got a unit of cavalry and nigh on two hundred Indians, but they'll have to be enough. We'll take along a couple of well-equipped pack trains, so we should want for nothing. The rest is up to us.'

And the rest, the others knew only too well, was indeed up to them.

It was in April of 1883 that the cavalcade entered Mexico on the first stage of its mission. Crook and his companions made a disastrous start, for though every man believed that the Sierra Madres would be a difficult enough proposition, no one anticipated the run of near-tragedy that beset the project from its beginning.

As the men and animals wound higher and still higher among the cruel peaks it was nature that took the first toll, not Geronimo and his renegades, wherever they might be.

Horses sweated and slipped in the rarefied air; mules went hurtling over terrible precipices, taking with them valuable stores and equipment.

The cavalrymen dismounted, tugging and heaving the frightened beasts along the narrow ledges, where a foot placed carelessly meant a drop of many thousand feet.

Only the Indians seemed to take the hazards in their stride, climbing steadily and quickly without faltering.

Crook looked round, realizing this was no way to tackle the most dangerous desperado, who was only waiting for them to completely exhaust themselves before swooping down for the kill.

The Apachés were capable of tackling their renegade countrymen, but without the advantage of the officers' leadership would soon be finished off.

But the General did not give up easily. 'Might as well catch the varmints, now we've come so far!' he grunted, and proceeded to make fresh plans.

It was absurd, he reasoned, to strike still further into the Sierras, weakening his party to the utmost degree. Instead he decided to pitch a main camp where supplies and reinforcements would always be available, and from that to make individual sorties with small groups of men.

So the Apache volunteers began their real work—that of trying to pick up the trail of the elusive Geronimo. For day

after day not a trace of the renegade was discovered, and even Crook began to doubt the reliable sources that had told him the outlaws were hidden somewhere in the vicinity.

Then at last the first success was achieved. A party of Apache scouts and one of the American lieutenants stumbled quite by chance across a small camp that was well hidden in a deep fold of the mountains.

There was no doubt that the inhabitants were outcasts, for no other Indian would live in that area, where the daily struggle for survival was far worse than even the most barren and mismanaged reservation.

The scouts struck—and found not more than a handful of Indian women, awaiting the return of their menfolk from a raid in Mexico.

‘Never mind,’ drawled Lieutenant Crawford, ‘you’ll be comin’ back with us to headquarters. We’ve a feelin’ you’ll talk before long!’

And indeed the squaws were able to give General Crook much useful information.

As he listened the senior officer felt that this was really the beginning of the whole Geronimo campaign, and like the good soldier he was, intended to make the most of the intelligence at his disposal.

‘So Chief Hoo is dead, eh? That’s a good start.’ He looked up to Captain Crawford, who stood by his side. ‘Sounds to me as though Geronimo’s not got it all his own way after all.’

The women’s frightened words confirmed that this was indeed the case. In fact, instead of being the leader of massed renegades, as Geronimo had always planned, it appeared as though now he had only a few loyal warriors by his side. The others were fighting in separate units, often quarrelling violently between themselves, and embarking on their marauding activities in a state that bordered upon open mutiny.

After the other setbacks this seemed promising, for if such were the case the renegades would be weak and undecided when they found their safety threatened.

General George Crook now saw that he had a chance to turn this duel among the high Sierras into a battle of wits, and preferred it that way.

The General wanted no unnecessary bloodshed, and knew only too well that his Company would be hard put to round up the renegades in their entirety.

But he had here, in the warriors' squaws, a most valuable weapon.

So he spoke to them by means of an interpreter, choosing words they would find easy to understand and relying on the women's common sense to do the rest.

'Hear me, women of the mountains. You have seen that we mean you no harm; now understand that what I have to say shall only bring good, even as the ways of Geronimo have brought great misery to your people.'

The squaws squatted, eyes downcast and their attitude seemingly indifferent. But Crook knew that his opening had been received with interest, if not actual enthusiasm.

He continued :

'Even as I am known as Chief Grey Wolf to all Apachés, be they good or bad, so I am known as one who treats all men fairly. I do not kill innocent prisoners, such as yourselves, and anyone who surrenders to my own warriors shall be sure of just and honourable treatment.

'On the other hand, you must know that my code does not readily forgive deceit, and any of your menfolk who think to trick me shall regret it before they die.'

One woman looked up to the speaker, her dark face still defiant.

'Though you may come among us and hunt us as mountain lions,' she scowled. 'We shall prove more than a match for your white soldiers.'

'That may be,' replied Crook calmly, 'but do not forget the Apachés that ride with me. They are of your nation and are as skilled as the cleverest outlaws in the ways of mountain warfare.'

The General had played his strongest card, and there was no denying the logic of that gentle threat.

'Therefore,' he continued, 'if I let you go your ways it shall be under promise of going back to your husbands and telling them the truth, even as I have just told it to you. Let them return with you to surrender, then you shall have nothing more to fear.'

As the women began to rise Crook concluded,

'One last thing. Take good care that Geronimo hears of this meeting. Let it be known that I expect him here before many suns have set. Otherwise my warriors shall take his trail, and his hours will be numbered!'

Without another word the women left Crook's camp, watched by the American officers.

'I wonder if we've done right?' mused Captain Crawford, thoughtfully.

'Can't say fer sure,' drawled Lieutenant Gatewood. 'But they sure took it all in. If I know women, they won't want their lords an' masters cut up fer Sunday dinner!'

But the General's face was grave, for he knew what was at stake.

'We can only wait and see,' he said quietly.

And that was what the warriors and men of the Apache Scouts proceeded to do.

Twenty-four hours later it was clear that Crook's words were going to produce results. Chief Chato, one of Geronimo's ex-allies, but latterly one of his fiercest rivals, was the first outlaw to ride in and place his weapons at the feet of the American general.

With him came the wives and families of his warriors, many of whom were in a far worse state than the Government troops would have imagined.

But to all who surrendered General Crook gave his word. 'You shall ride with us down to the reservations and live there, knowing the peace that your fellows already enjoy,' then he

ended. 'But I have yet to greet one without whom there can be no return. Therefore you must wait here until he comes.'

Everyone knew to whom the general was referring.

The days passed, with still no sign of the outlaw.

Secretly General Crook began to worry. Though he had said that should Geronimo fail to appear he would send troops out to get him it could never be anything but a bluff.

Geronimo obviously had his spies watching the enemy camp, and would be well clear before the Apache scouts came within striking distance of his band.

Added to which supplies were beginning to run dangerously low.

The feeding of the Indians who had already surrendered presented a problem in itself. Soon there would be no rations left at all, and the expedition would be forced to withdraw from the mountains, or stay on, too weak to fight if set upon unexpectedly.

It was an unpleasant and ignominious situation, and the officers could not help wondering how much of it was caused by Geronimo's clever calculations.

'I'll wait a day longer,' Crook growled, 'and if the varmint doesn't come then. . . .'

But Geronimo did come. The outlaw rode into camp at the head of several sub-chiefs, one of whom carried a white flag.

The troops mustered to see his entrance, firmly believing that now the last of their troubles was over. With Geronimo at last in their power they could return from this accursed mountain region where the air tasted like bitter wine and precipitous passes made heads spin dizzily.

'All right, Injun—I'll take your gun!' a husky sergeant strode over to Geronimo and reached up towards his saddle.

'Get back, white man!' the renegade's words snapped out like bullets from a repeating rifle. 'I give arms to no one!'

The N.C.O. was taken aback. 'But you've come to surrender. . . .'

'I have come to parley,' Geronimo pointed to the white flag. 'No palaver is a sign of weakness—and you may yet regret asking me to this meeting!'

General Crook came out to talk to the warriors, who refused to dismount or mingle in any way with the onlookers, either American or Indian.

'Keep your distance,' warned the outlaw chief, glaring round suspiciously. 'I have warriors placed all round and above this place, and the first one to abuse this truce shall die!'

Crook had no intention of any such action, but he saw that instead of victory he was now facing almost certain disaster.

Geronimo the rogue wolf had tricked his enemies again, leading them to believe he might come in to surrender, but in actual fact forcing them to accept the terms he now dictated.

'You will leave the Sierra Madres at once,' the renegade commanded, 'taking our people who are in need of nourishment, and looking after them in the manner your government has promised.'

The general looked his man straight in the face. 'If we do this thing you will surrender and live in peace also?'

Geronimo grinned. 'I did not say that, white man. We shall see!'

And Crook had to be content with that. He had been out-manceuvred, both mentally and physically. Being a man of honour he had to abide by the terms that the wily and unscrupulous outlaw had so cleverly foisted upon him.

When the renegades rode away they were followed only by the eyes of the silent men in the camp. Several hands must have been poised near gun triggers, but Geronimo had made the consequences of any gunplay clear enough. Though the rebel warriors now presented an easy enough target the troopers knew that they would never live to see another dawn if so much as a single shot brought the war-leader from his horse.

And life was sweet, even though it meant defeat and disgrace for those who but a little while previously had sworn never to leave the mountains without their quarry.

So the duel was over. Geronimo had scored again. At the back of his agile mind was forming the first outline of a plan that, if successful, would bring about his life's ambition.

He could still be chief of all the Apaches and drive the enemy from the land !

CHAPTER XIX

THE PLOT THAT FAILED

THOUGH General Crook had triumphed in persuading many of the Apache warriors to leave the trail and come in to the reservations, he had failed in his attempt to bring Geronimo to heel.

It was with typical beaurocracy that the authorities chose to ignore the most successful side of the General's venture and concentrate on the single failure.

Men who would never have had the courage to endure that ride into the Sierra Madres, and who would have fainted with fright on sight of a renegade Indian now sought to press for Crook's resignation.

The War Department turned on him, and the press of Arizona let loose a spate of derisive articles, doubting the officer's ability for the job that he had, when all was said and done, carried out better than many had originally anticipated.

Crook only sighed and got on with whatever he had to attend to next. That, he supposed, was life. He had expected no glory, and certainly had got none. Even if it had been his luck to bring Geronimo in chained hand and foot he doubted if the achievement would have been remembered for long.

'Folks,' he mused, 'are the strangest animals! I'd best get back to work and wait until I can have another smack at the varmint!'

At least the general made sure that a happier state of affairs existed on the reservations, for he was a just and far-seeing soldier.

'Davis,' he said, calling one of the lieutenants to him, 'I think we'll divide the Injuns into two parts—those who have taken the path against us, and those who haven't. That scalpin' notion's mighty infectious, an' we don't want it spreadin'!'

So the now-peaceful Apaches were duly divided, with the

erstwhile outlaws living by themselves in the White Mountain district.

But Crook did not stop there. He knew that the warriors were energetic and restless men, and would find it hard to settle down for long to a life of inactivity.

So the idea of the Apache police was used again. With the help and advice of Lieutenant Davis, in command of the outlaw reservation, the general recruited fresh volunteers from those who took an oath of allegiance to the United States.

Most of the new force came from warriors of Crook's own Apache Scouts, but when he cast round to find a suitable commander it was not such an easy matter.

Finally Lieutenant Davis made a suggestion.

'What about Chato, sir?'

Crook frowned. 'It's a thought,' he admitted. 'But I'm not so sure. Wasn't he once a friend of Geronimo's?'

'That's true enough,' said the junior officer, 'but I understand they fell out a while ago. It seems to me that such a man would be ideal. In case of any funny business he'd be only too keen to get his own back. Why not try him out and see?'

So it was decided to appoint Chief Chato to the rank of sergeant in the new force. General Crook was not to be disappointed.

Chato certainly gave no hint that he would ever revert to his old warlike ways, and worked well and closely with his immediate superior, the young American lieutenant.

Once he even went to Crook, suggesting that he should lead a band of warriors into Mexico to track down and deal with Geronimo.

The general looked hard at his Apache sergeant, but Chato's eyes were honest enough. Then Crook shook his head.

'Can't be done, I'm afraid. Under terms of the treaty we're only allowed to cross the border when actually after the varmint, and at the moment we don't even know where he is!'

Then Crook smiled. It was good to know he had a few friends of both races and felt sure that they would not always

be disappointed in the orders that he was sometimes forced to give.

'The old wolf will come sniffin' back one day—perhaps sooner than any of us think. When that happens I want to be ready.'

Something in the way Chato eased his hunting knife told the general that there was no need to worry.

Whatever lay ahead at least one Apache could be relied on. In Chato alone Geronimo might meet his match.

There was now an element of very strong feeling developing against Geronimo from his own people. Those who had settled down to life on the reservations found it to their liking, for with all responsibilities taken off their shoulders by white authority they were free to live their own lives as never before.

The bad name that the Apaches had earned for themselves began slowly to fade, and in due course was destined to become nothing more than a legend. But while Geronimo was free the Indians realized that they could never claim the complete respect of their ex-enemies. Though he did not now represent the entire tribe Geronimo's reputation was so fearsome and his deeds so notorious that the more peaceful members of his race were likely to suffer in consequence.

Now the spells of the tribal medicine men were turned against the renegade leader, and it seemed as though sooner or later Geronimo must be overcome, either by the strength of the American forces ranged against him, or by superstitious dread of some strong secret magic.

But Geronimo was frightened of no one. He was no bully in the accepted sense, and would willingly take on any number of challengers. That he had so far always got the better of his foes was proof enough of his capabilities.

For many months Geronimo lay low, perfecting a plan that he believed would at last bring him within reach of his life's ambition.

He gritted his teeth in determination. 'My people are fools

to take what the white men give them. They are like wild animals who have had their claws and teeth drawn and can no longer kill their own food! But with me at their head again we can take the trail and kill every frontiersman in the State. Those who call themselves Americans believe all the fighting to be over—but it has not yet begun!’

Geronimo had no difficulty in convincing himself that he was about to bring off his greatest coup, but even he knew it could never be done single handed.

‘I must have my sub-chiefs back again. Naiche, Mangas, Chihuahua—I need them all.’

And so, using his own methods, the renegade set about contacting the warriors who had once ridden by his side and who were soon to be persuaded to do so again.

The White Mountain Reservation was wide, and lay in a natural area rich with game. The Indians who lived there found it a paradise of hunting, and their families never went short of meat or fish for the cooking pots.

In his headquarters Lieutenant Davis kept a constant eye on the tribe, but did not believe in interfering with their normal life, and never went with them on the hunting expeditions that took the tribesmen deep into the bush that fringed their villages.

Under such conditions it was easy for Geronimo to hide up, waiting his opportunity to contact his old companions, and making sure that what he had to say was heard by no uninvited listener.

Naiche was the first one. He had long been friendly with Geronimo and together they had fought through the war that Cochise, Naiche’s father, had waged against the first settlers.

But like so many others Naiche had decided (in Geronimo’s opinion), to take the easy way out. That he was now a far happier man was beside the point. Such as Geronimo could never be happy except when pitting their skill in battle, and he could never understand why any warrior should prefer the white man’s way of life to his own.

So when the two friends talked of the old days on the trail Geronimo very cleverly began to outline to Naiche his ideas for the future. His manner was persuasive as always when he had set his heart on something, and he soon had the other more than a little interested.

'But are you sure of this thing?' Naiche's tone of voice showed the effects of successful persuasion.

Geronimo continued, determined to complete his verbal victory.

'You owe it to the memory of your father, the great Cochise. It is left to only a few of us now to preserve the Apache name. Before long it will be too late. Our people will dwell like cattle on the poor lands the white men have seen fit to provide for us. Their spirit will be gone; they will wish for nothing but what the white men promise them—and often refuse. They will be slaves!'

The words had their desired effect. Naiche rose, and in his very manner was the arrogance of a natural warrior.

'I will do as you wish,' he said.

Geronimo nodded. 'Then bring the others to me,' he replied, 'I will tell you what to do, and before long we shall ride together again to lead our people from the grip of their oppressors.'

Naiche, despite his warlike past, was a popular man, well liked and respected by both whites and fellow tribesmen alike.

Geronimo knew that in winning his old friend back to his side he had scored his first success. Cunning words had been whispered in Naiche's ear, and now it remained to be seen what result they would produce.

Geronimo had done his work well. So impressed was Naiche with the renegade's scheme and promises for the future that he soon enrolled the two strongest warriors in support.

Though Mangas, son of Mangas Coloradus, was also a popular man, in the Apache's veins still flowed the restless blood of his ancestors. Consequently, when offered what sounded like a

wonderful chance to live again the old life of adventure, Mangas did not hesitate.

'For too long have I been on this reservation,' he thought, 'my body is growing thick and flabby, and I sleep too much. That is no life for an Apache warrior!'

So Geronimo won another willing recruit.

The third man was Chihuahua, and he needed no encouragement at all. He had dwelt under the American yolk unwillingly, only seeking some chance that would cause him to ride into battle, seeking scalps and screaming his war-cry as in the days now long past.

This sub-chief was completely untamed, and was to remain so until his dying day, as indeed were many of his fellows.

Geronimo was well aware of this, and traded upon the fact for his own ends.

The plan that he now embarked upon was a tricky one, and demanded a lot of confidence. But then, Geronimo had never been lacking in that commodity!

His task was to make sure that every available Apache warrior—all those living in comparative comfort on the reservations—was somehow enticed away and encouraged to take the war-path again.

There were still enough tribesmen to whip the American forces, Geronimo calculated. But they needed a leader, and he believed himself to be that man.

Once he had the armed warriors he required the rest would be comparatively easy. The element of surprise that governed the plot should also be a deciding factor in the coming battle. But Geronimo did not forget that the initial stages of his plan were perhaps the most dangerous ones.

'Nothing must go wrong!' He knew himself to be alone, defying the world. In his mind, warped as it might be in its outlook, the whole future of his race lay in his hands. The lust for power which had dominated his life was stronger than ever now, nurtured by the successes, intensified by the failures that had been his in the past.

So when he believed the time to be right, Geronimo entered into the first stage of his prepared plan, calculated to bring about the greatest Apache rising and victory of all time.

First of all he called Naiche and Mangas to him. Together they sat in a remote part of the White Mountain country, listening as their leader began his carefully thought out story.

'You know my powers as a medicine man?'

The hearers nodded, for always had Geronimo been noted as one of the foremost Apache healers and mystics. He now intended to make the most of that reputation.

'The spirits of our fathers have been in touch with me,' he leant closer, dropping his voice to a whisper. 'They send word that our people are in terrible danger.'

'From whom?' Mangas frowned in perplexity.

'Who else but the white men?'

'But I do not understand. The white men have promised to look after us—even protect us. For long have we been living on specially reserved land. . . .'

Geronimo laid a hand on the speaker's arm. 'But of course, my brother. Do you not see that such a move makes the white men's intention all the more simple?'

'And what is their intention?'

'To wipe out all our people! If they have their way not so much as a single squaw shall escape to breed further children! Despite all their promises the white men want to be rid of us. Do you think they would give us lands that they themselves need for their own people? No, my friends. They give us such territories only to take them—and our lives also!'

Geronimo paused a moment to let his words sink in. The reassuring silence was proof enough that the other two were impressed.

'Even now the American cavalry are making ready for this big massacre.'

'But where? I have seen no sign of them.' Naiche's remonstrance was only half-hearted.

'Fool! Do you think General Crook wants this known? He

wishes to be thought of as our benefactor. That is why, when the time comes, he will pounce, saying that much as he loves our people he has been forced to put us down to save those of his own race! We must be ready for this thing. Would you have your wives and families slaughtered?"

'How do you know?' countered Mangas.

Geronimo folded his arms. 'I know,' was all he would say.

And so confident did he appear that the listeners believed him.

With the first part of Geronimo's scheme successfully launched he concentrated on the second.

Naiche and Mangas were innocently spreading the word of an American massacre, telling their people to be ready at the first hint of trouble. They were to overthrow the officer-in-charge and agent at the reservation, and make an all-out attempt to reach safety in the nearest Mexican mountains. Now Geronimo contacted Chihuahua.

This third warrior represented another vital aspect to the renegade's plot, for without the sub-chief's assistance the planned rising would never take shape.

So Geronimo met his man in the depth of the bush, just as he had done Mangas and Naiche. But the story told to Chihuahua was a very different one.

'Our dead fathers have visited me,' murmured Geronimo. 'They say that there is one among our people who means them great harm. This man is in league with one of the white men and together they plan to take the lives of our leaders who dwell on the reservation. One of those lives will be yours!'

Geronimo watched the other's eyes, and saw that he had produced the desired effect.

'Can you tell me who this traitor might be?' he continued.

'There is such a one,' replied Chihuahua hesitantly. 'Chato is very friendly with the fat white lieutenant named Davis. Perhaps. . . .'

'Say no more!'

Geronimo went on to the completion of the intrigue. 'These two men are dangerous, and must be killed.'

'Yes, I see it now,' agreed the slower thinking sub-chief. 'But how shall that be done?'

Geronimo proceeded to outline the last part of the scheme.

'I believe that you have two nephews?'

Chihuahua nodded.

'And are they not members of the Apache Scouts?'

Again agreement.

'Then, as they are of your kin, and respect you as their uncle, these young braves will do anything you might desire.'

The sub-chief puffed out his barrel chest with pride.

'Of course. Am I not a famous warrior in my own right? You can rely on them, for they dare not disobey.'

This was just what Geronimo wanted to hear, for much depended on the action of Chihuahua's nephews.

'Then listen to me, famous warrior!' The speaker could not resist a jibe at the other's conceit.

'This is what you will instruct your brother's sons to do. When next Chato parades his scouts these young men will be in the ranks, each with a loaded gun. When the white officer Davis and Chato come out to review the warriors your nephews will shoot them down.'

Even Chihuahua was astounded by the matter-of-fact tone in which Geronimo announced the assassination, but before he could say anything the other went on.

'When the men lie dead you will swiftly take the news to Mangas and Naiche, saying that a mutiny has broken out. Warn them that Crook and his cavalry will be coming then seize horses and lead our people out of camp. Head for Mexico, and I shall join you there. Is this understood?'

Chihuahua dared not let his leader see the doubt that flooded into his mind.

Neither dared he argue, for Geronimo was well known as a violent man.

So the sub-chief assented.

Geronimo rose, closing the palaver.

'Very well. Go you and do as I say. I shall be waiting, and when the tribe has regained its freedom I shall once again be your chief, to lead you to final victory over the accursed white men.'

And so all was set for the big coup. Geronimo was confident that within a matter of hours every Apache on the reservation would be on the trail, ready to fight under his command.

Chief Chato and the fat Lieutenant Davis would be dead, and the American authorities would have suffered one of their bitterest defeats.

But something went wrong.

On the morning in question, with the Apache scouts on parade, Chato had already received word that a Geronimo plot was in the air.

The Apache chief was no coward, and went on with the daily routine, ready for whatever might develop.

He mustered his most trustworthy warriors, telling them that violence was likely, but did not know from which quarter it might come.

All seemed quiet enough as Chato and Lieutenant Davis moved along the front rank of the armed scouts. Suddenly there came a scuffle in the rear, and two warriors stepped forward, pointing their guns straight at the stomachs of the officers.

But before Davis had chance to reach for his revolver, or even before Chato could call a warning the two would-be assassins were ringed by their companions, who knocked the rifles from their hands.

One of the renegades screamed, and his voice carried over the reservation to where Naiche and Mangas had been waiting.

Chihuahua too, was all ready for the showdown, but when the climax came it was in anything but the manner the sub-chiefs had anticipated.

They rushed for their horses, shouting to the warriors to follow.

But there was little response.

'Stay where you are!' thundered Chato. 'Any man who deserts has to answer to me. This is Geronimo's work. Return to him now and you shall be hunted down and killed like coyotes!'

But the reservation was now in uproar, and many of the chief's words were drowned in the *mêlée* of sound that rose from the tribal wickiups.

Women and children screamed, men shouted to each other, horses whinnied and kicked, dogs barked.

From that scene of chaos it was hard to believe that order could ever result.

The three sub-chiefs took their chance. They seized mounts and swept out of the vicinity, taking with them what volunteers they could find.

The Apaché scouts remained loyal to a man, acting like the trained troops they were on the commands of Lieutenant Davis, who placed himself at their head and prepared to lead them out in pursuit of the rebels.

As Mangas and Naiche galloped away they realized how they had been tricked.

But it was too late to turn back now, for they would only meet the Apaché scouts, and in all probability be shot by their own countrymen before they could surrender.

'Geronimo has something to answer for!' growled the son of Cochise.

When Geronimo heard what had happened he was angry with himself and with the men who had failed in what he considered to be their duty.

Instead of the massed warrior hordes that he had expected, and which were so necessary for a successful rising, Geronimo was faced with less than fifty!

The remainder, impressed by the loyalty of the scouts, had remained on the reservation.

That they should have refused to join their renegade chief when he called was the hardest blow of all to Geronimo's confidence.

Now they rode on, those few Apachés who had been forced into this rout.

And even as Chato had promised, they were already being followed.

Instead of the great surprise that Geronimo had intended, the tables had been turned on him with a vengeance.

He rode madly for the safety of the Mexican mountains, driving with him a herd of squaws and bawling children—the only section of the Indian community who had answered his call.

Now it was a race for life—Geronimo's life.

He gritted his teeth. He would not give in to the white authority he hated so much. He would never give in.

The American troops would have to catch him, and he determined to make sure they got the ride of their lives!

CHAPTER XX

RENEGADE ROUND-UP

BEHIND Geronimo and the fleeing Apaches the telegraph wires were buzzing. Messages flashed across country, taking the news to the outlying forts and alerting troops.

Number of Apaches have risen. Believed to be making for Mexico. They must be caught at all costs.

It was in Geronimo's favour that the American authorities did not yet know how many rebels they had to deal with, but at least the renegade chief had no illusions about the situation.

Before long the land would be black with enemy horsemen—both American and Apache—looking for the rebels, trying to prevent them gaining their destination.

At all costs the Sierra Madres must be reached, for therein lay Geronimo's only hope of safety.

Fort Thomas was called on the telegraph, but strangely enough no reply was received from the operator there.

The signal officer looked up in perplexity. 'What's gone wrong? We must contact Captain Pierce somehow. By my reckoning Geronimo and his wolves are sure to pass that way. . . .'

Then a grim thought struck him.

'Perhaps,' he murmured, 'they've passed that way already—and dealt with the garrison!'

But this in actual fact was not the case. It had not taken Geronimo long to guess that the overhead wires were busy with news of the breakout.

Making a short detour he headed straight for the nearest point at which the telegraph lines passed. Then, watched by his small band of tired and disillusioned Apaches, Geronimo set to work.

He shinned smartly up a tree to which the wire was fastened, and with one stroke of his knife severed the communication.

But that was not all. Taking from his waist a length of rawhide he proceeded to join it to the broken ends, so that by the time the operation was complete it was hard to tell that the cable had been cut at all.

Then the riders galloped on. The hue and cry was now widespread, but Geronimo's action in all probability saved his life, for the news never reached Fort Thomas until the riders were well clear of the neighbourhood.

There followed many days and nights in which the three sub-chiefs, their leader, and the few who had thrown in their lot with the rebels led their pursuers a devilish chase.

The Apachés scarcely stopped for rest, and gradually began to pull away from the troops on their trail.

One mistake the Americans made was to set off with too many men and too few provisions, which meant that at least one contingent, under Captain Crawford, had to break off the search and return to Fort Bowie to replenish their stores.

The only ones who stood a chance of catching up with Geronimo were the Apaché Scouts, but Geronimo was equipped with a pair of powerful field glasses, and made sure that his own countrymen did not pick up the trail.

The scouts were hampered by their white officers, for not even Al Sieber, experienced tracker that he was, could keep pace with the Apaché troops, who had to hold back for further orders.

Perhaps there was a slight possibility that Lieutenant Davis and Al Sieber were still nervous of their warriors going over to the other side.

Certainly the hardships the Apaché scouts and their leaders endured were enough to make many men give up. Not only were they short of food, but their horses were lame. Then the rains set in.

The heavy deluge completely obliterated Geronimo's trail, and slowed down the pursuit to a crawl.

But for over a hundred and twenty miles the scouts kept on, doggedly making their way after the elusive outlaws. Pick-

ing up the trail, losing it again, but somehow always hanging on to what few clues remained of Geronimo's passing.

Seventeen days later the rebels reached their goal.

It was with great relief that Geronimo must have led his wretched followers into the eastern part of the great Sierra Madres.

Now they were in little better shape than those who struggled in their wake.

The Apachés' ponies had all gone; eaten to provide food for the women and children.

The warriors were in poor condition to fight, but there was no necessity to do so, for the government forces were still well over a day's march away.

But perhaps the hard-riding American troopers might yet have succeeded if it had not been for one of those small incidents that alter the footprints of history, if only for an instant.

Lieutenant Davis and his men had rallied well, and were now moving forward towards the distant mountains, intent on stopping the rebels before they lost touch with them in the foothills.

A tired sergeant rose in his stirrups, pointing ahead.

'Look—there are the varmints!'

And sure enough Geronimo and his companions could be seen, a cluster of black dots moving desperately towards the hilly horizon.

'They're only a mile or two away,' Davis calculated the distance quickly. 'We should just about catch 'em before they get into the Sierras!'

Putting spurs to weary horses the blue-coats cantered off, hot on Geronimo's trail.

But their good fortune was not to last for long.

A trooper shouted, gesturing away to one flank, where another bunch of riders could be seen. But these were no Indians, and they approached instead of retreating, obviously intent on heading off the American contingent.

'What the heck's goin' on?' growled a burly veteran, 'just as we've got Geronimo in the bag. . . .'

Lieutenant Davis raised his glasses, then shouted a command which brought his men tugging hard on their horses' leathers.

'Those are Mexicans—and we're on their territory!'

The Mexican officer, when he rode up, made no secret of the fact that he wished their fellow horsemen anywhere but there.

'But why don't we team up?' suggested Davis, knowing that each passing minute helped Geronimo nearer to safety. 'We'll catch the Injuns together, and. . .'

But the swarthy colonel would not hear of it. 'Return to your own country,' he said haughtily. 'We are perfectly capable of dealing with those renegades, *señor*.'

And there was no alternative but to obey, for not only were the Americans trespassers, in the strict sense of the word, but Davis was also outranked by the Mexican officer.

'The durned fools!' grunted a cavalry sergeant. 'No Mex was ever a match for Geronimo and his boys. They'll slip away now, sure as fate. An' there's nothin' we can do to stop 'em!'

That indeed proved to be the case. The Mexican riders cantered off towards the purpling horizon, but the Apaches had gained fresh ground.

Night was falling, and it would be no hard task for the rebels to reach and hide in the mountains during the hours of darkness.

And so Geronimo, making the most of his good fortune, prepared to fight again.

Nearly six months passed, during which time no further sign of the renegades was seen.

But evidence of their existence was everywhere, for the dreaded raids had begun again, and more fiercely than ever before.

Solitary ranch houses blazed, seemingly of their own accord; Mexican farmers and their families were found, headless

bundles of clothing who could never tell when or how their murderers had attacked.

The American authorities cursed and prepared to organize a further campaign against a handful of Indians who were holding the country to ransom.

The Mexican Government panicked afresh, appealing for volunteers to fight Geronimo.

When these were slow in coming the prisons were opened, and their toughest occupants pressed into service.

This new irregular army was of dubious value since its members were more interested in looting than fighting unseen Apaches. But at least something was being done—even if Geronimo and his warriors laughed at the consequences!

Meanwhile other events were taking place in Washington.

General Crook, heavily criticized for his failure to prevent the Geronimo outbreak, had in return requested to be transferred. He was given the Texas command, while General Miles took up duties in Arizona with five thousand troops at his disposal.

But that was only half the number engaged on this vast-scale manhunt, and still Geronimo continued to keep his enemies guessing.

He scorned evasive action all the time, and frequently stormed down from his mountain hideout to engage some military patrol that his spies had reported in the vicinity.

Yet all the while the law's wide net was closing slowly but inexorably around the handful of renegades who continued to resist in such an amazing fashion.

Geronimo must have known that sooner or later he would be forced to surrender, but with typical determination made sure that such an action would be of his own choice, and the pattern of doing so his own design.

Of all the troops who had trailed the renegades during the long months past, Lieutenant Gatewood and his men had proved some of the most determined.

This American, one of the three chosen officers of the

Apaché scouts, was destined to see the end of the story. For Al Sieber and Lieutenant Davis were working another part of the territory, Captain Crawford was dead, killed in a brawl with the Geronimo marauders, and General Crook had relinquished his command.

Gatewood himself was a sick man, but when he found it possible to close with the rogue warriors he did not hesitate or shirk his duty.

The lieutenant at first found it hard to believe that he should be so near Geronimo's stronghold, but there was no denying the word of the scouts who reported this.

Then I'll have to make the most of my chance, thought Gatewood. If he thinks we've got him surrounded he'll be forced to parley.

He sent for two of his men. 'Kieta and Martine, you've both ridden with Geronimo in your time.' The men nodded, remembering the wild days in which they had defied the Americans as their relentless ex-leader was still doing. 'I want you to contact the renegades,' went on Gatewood, 'you have your own ways of doing that.'

Kieta smiled at his companion. Though the white men were now as brothers there were still some things they admittedly did not understand.

'Tell Geronimo that I am willing to talk or fight, whichever he wishes,' said the officer, adding significantly. 'But if he should choose guns he won't have much longer in this world!'

At least the bluff was worth trying; something must result as a consequence, and Gatewood did not mean to let a chance like this slip lightly through his fingers.

He knew, as did the two scouts, that they might never return. But they were brave men, and had been chosen purposely for their task.

If Geronimo saw that warriors who had once fought by his side could be permanently influenced for the good, and risk their lives to talk with their late companions, surely he must realize that his own cause was a hopeless one?

Many hours of uncertainty followed the scouts' going. Gatewood prayed that he had not vainly sacrificed two brave men's lives, but there was nothing that could be done now save wait.

Should Kieta and Martine fail to return, Geronimo and his pack of wolves should pay, swore the lieutenant—and pay dearly.

But the two Apachés did return, and with surprisingly good news.

'Geronimo will palaver,' said Kieta, 'he will meet you in the Canyon of the Frauds.'

'Hm,' Lieutenant Gatewood pursed his lips. 'Might have guessed there was a snag in it somewhere!' The officer looked hard at the two warriors before speaking again.

'You know as well as I do that canyon's the durndest place in all the Sierra Madres. Geronimo's only got to place his men on top of the cliffs overlooking the arroyo. We'll ride in to find ourselves completely surrounded an' be sittin' ducks to their guns if the varmints open fire.'

There was no denying that fact. But as the Apaché scouts pointed out, there was also no alternative.

'Geronimo will only meet us there,' repeated Martine, 'it is a risk that must be taken.'

'Yes,' grunted the lieutenant, stretching his long legs. 'An' a mighty one-sided risk at that!' Then he rose slowly, feeling the stiffness of old wounds cramp his limbs. He had reached his decision. 'Stand by to move off. We'll meet Geronimo!'

So Gatewood and his scouts prepared to ride for the canyon, well aware that they might never leave it alive.

As they entered the mouth of the narrow ravine it was hard not to look up and around, for every man sensed that he was being watched. Somewhere above, invisible guns were raised to draw beads on their human targets.

But by no word or deed did Lieutenant Gatewood and his warriors show the slightest apprehension.

Their own weapons were loaded, but everyone knew that

there would be no chance to reach them before a blaze of fire swept the canyon.

No gunfire came. Instead there was Geronimo standing arrogantly before them.

'Greetings white man,' his voice mocked the visitor, 'you wish to palaver with me?'

Gatewood dismounted leisurely. 'I've come for you, Geronimo.'

A brief silence. Then surprising words from the renegade, with an all-too-familiar additional clause.

'And I am prepared to go with you—on my own terms.'

'And what may they be?' Gatewood calmly rolled and lit a cigarette.

'That my warriors are not punished for the way of life they have chosen. They must be allowed to keep their arms.'

The Apache scouts looked across at their officer, knowing it was going to be a battle of wills. Gatewood needed that surrender badly, and Geronimo needed it too, in his own way. It was a question of who would give way first—and in what manner.

While the two leaders disagreed death still lurked in the canyon.

'Go on, Geronimo.' Gatewood almost encouraged his opponent to name further conditions. And the renegade chief, feeling that he was getting his own way, proceeded to do so.

'We must be free to live on the San Carlos Reservation with our people. But in no way must the white men interfere with us, allowing us to come and go as we wish.'

'To plunder and kill more innocent settlers while all the time you live comfortably at our government's expense?' asked the lieutenant; then he shook his head determinedly. 'No Geronimo, that will not do. Now I'll tell you my terms.'

The Apache was momentarily taken aback and found himself being forced to listen.

'Surrender now,' said Gatewood, 'and you will be treated honourably as prisoners-of-war. You will be disarmed and sent

to some reservation far from San Carlos where you can do no more damage. You will be well looked after, according to my people's code—but you will never be free to ride the war-path again !'

Geronimo thought for a moment, then said :

'But what if I refuse?'

'If you refuse,' replied Gatewood evenly, 'you will never know peace again as long as you live. General Miles will bring more and more troops on to your trail. Your warriors cannot escape them for ever. Though you may kill more white soldiers and loyal Apaches your warriors also will be killed. In the end there will be none left. Then it will be your turn. You cannot hope to escape indefinitely, for with every man's hand against you, life will become impossible.'

It was not a pretty picture the lieutenant painted, but both he and Geronimo knew it was a true one.

'Give me until dawn to make my decision,' said Geronimo finally. 'I must consult my sub-chiefs. After sunrise I shall return to palaver again.'

Gatewood knew he had to agree. Nothing would be resolved by trying to force the issue at that stage, but he could not help wondering what the coming hours might hold.

The government troops were forced to camp in the canyon for the night, knowing that their retreat was cut off, and that, should Geronimo have a sudden change of heart they could be massacred by the encircling ring of hidden riflemen.

But the dark hours passed without incident, and scarcely had the first rays of sun gilded the rocky heights when a file of figures emerged from the shadowy depths of the gorge.

'Geronimo and his wolves come to surrender !'

The excited cry of an Apache scout proved correct, and soon the lieutenant stood before a rapidly growing pile of arms and ammunition that the renegades sulkily delivered as final proof of their intention.

Now it was all over. Geronimo at last admitted he could fight no more. He was a battle-scarred warrior of fifty-eight

summers, forty-six of which had been spent on the war trail, resisting the coming of the white men to the bitter end.

And for one such as Geronimo it must have been a bitter end indeed.

He had known his years of glory, when an entire continent trembled at the mention of his name. Perhaps he had always known it would come to this, but had always refused to admit the possibility of ultimate defeat.

Certainly there was no hint of regret in those deep-sunk eyes.

The past was dead, the present was inevitable—but what of the future?

There was little future left. After being escorted back to Arizona and Fort Bowie the renegades were entrained for the East, and exile in Florida.

There, on 17 February 1909, Geronimo was to die, a wizened, pathetic old drunkard of almost eighty.

But with his passing at Fort Sill there also passed the end of an era in the history of the great American south-west.

The land was safe now that Geronimo and his kind never rode out on the war-path.

But perhaps a little of the essence of real adventure had gone also.

THE END

